Turning my Bayan

RP media: Nagkulang ba sa good news?

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BSP chief says peso could reach 53:$1

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6 cops hurt in clash with kidnap gang

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Turning 100 no big deal, say Swedish twins

■ Sports

Arnaiz, Macasieb triathlon champs

Conflict on VAT bill shakes Joker's group

By Michael Lim Ubac

12 THE Senate's Blueprint Ang Ginoo led by Sen. Joker Arroyo finally breaking up?

Majority Leader Loren Pangilinan, a member of

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Party guns for '07 polls, bars pork lovers, 'trapos'

By Veh Contreras

NO "pigs" allowed in the "Noah's Ark."

Kapatiran, a young political party seeking the pork-barrel system, has a caricature of Noah's Ark on its membership forms and pamphlets which they distributed the other day, symbolizing the Filipinos's longing to flee

Monday, January 31, 2005 | 36 pages | vol. 29 | no. 34 | website: www.inq7.net

Recall VAT bill, Joker urges GMA

RECALLING the House-approved bill seeking to raise the value-added tax (VAT) rate to 12 percent is the "safe course" for President Macapagal-Arroyo "because whenever the outcome is in the Senate, it's not worth the political price it will cost her," Sen. Joker Arroyo said on the eve of the historic public hearing on the measure.

The senator, a member of the majority bloc, said the proposed VAT rate increase was "abrasive" as shown by the deliberations conducted in the House of Representatives last week.

A number of legislators walked out of the House after failing to block the tax measure. They said they would join the anti-VAT mass actions planned by militant groups.

Opponents of the bill claim that a VAT increase will be an added burden to the poor because it will lead to higher prices.

Despite the senator's appeal, the President is pushing for the approval of the measure in the Senate where some of her

(STORY: A2)

Int'l group slams gov't on media slays

AN IRAQI woman holds her ballot and ID card as she waits to vote at a polling station in the mainly Shiite Muslim city of Basra. On Sunday, Iraq held its first free election since 1953.

Killings traced to culture of violence

By Norman Bordadora

A WIDESPREAD culture of violence—often condoned by government officials—is to blame for the murders of journalists in the Philippines, cagayan as the world's second deadliest place for media workers after Iraq.

A fact-finding mission organized by the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its local affiliate released its preliminary findings yesterday after looking into the deaths last year of 13 Filipino journalists.

"When such a culture is allowed to flourish at an official level, it is little wonder that aggrieved local strongmen or political figures turn to hitmen to get even with the media," IFJ representative Gerard Ninomen said.

"It is completely unacceptable in a country with democratic credentials like the Philippines," Ninomen, a reporter for Australia's Sydney Morning Herald, added in a statement released by IFJ's regional affiliate, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP).

The killing of journalists, most of them in the provinces, has remained unchecked despite repeated attempts by government officials, from President Macapagal-Arroyo on down, that they cherish press freedom and will protect it.

Ninomen said the mission discovered instances of government officials, including mayors in two major cities, who openly supported the use of death squads in dealing with unruly elements in their areas.

Team members also cited reports supposedly made in jest by some of those in power that needed to encourage violence against journalists.

"Photos are sent to Sagada City Hall [a local journalist immediately told us of the provincial] PNP director who was quoted as saying, 'When I see media people, it seems that I suddenly have the urge to kill,'" said Rowena Carranza Paraan, NUJP secretary and managing editor of the online weekly

(STORY: A2)

No risk, no gain sure path to failure

By Armando Doronila

OVER the past seven months, President Macapagal-Arroyo has revamped her Cabinet three times—in July and August last year and last week. The changes re-

ANALYSIS

flect the administration's response to shifting power relations in the political arena.

While it would be erroneous to view these as discontinuities, they reveal a leadership style whose defining characteristic during its first six months in office is lack of authority and boldness in asserting it.

The first three or six months of a newly elected administration is normally a period of high expectations for fundamental

(STORY: A12)

36 killed in election attacks in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Iraq—Iraqis turned out in vote on Sunday in their country's first free election in a half-century, defying insurgents who launched deadly suicide bombings and mortar strikes at polling stations. By midday, at least 36 people were dead but the violence had slowed and voting picked up.

Casting his vote, Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi called it "the first time the Iraqis will determine their destiny." The head of the main Shiite slate expected to do well, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, said: "Iraq willing, the elections will be good."

Today's voting is extra important.

Despite the heavy attacks that began two hours after polls opened, turnout was brisk in many Shiite Muslim and mixed Shiite-Sunni neighborhoods, both in Baghdad and in southern cities like Basra.

Even in the small town of Sulaiman Beg, so-called "triangle of death" south of Baghdad—a mixed Sunni-Shiite area—20 people waited to vote at each of several polling centers. More walked to

"This is democracy," said an elderly woman in a black abaya, Karfia Ahmed, holding up a thumb stained with purple

(STORY: A13)

THE 14-pound "Pearl of Allah" as shown in 2003 photo.

$60-M pearl tied to misfortunes

DENVER—Legend has it that the so-called Pearl of Allah was a talisman a symbol of peace 2,500 years ago in ancient China. To Victor Barbish, the 6.4-kg gem—found on the Philippines more than 70 years ago—has been nothing but a big headache.

The rugby ball-sized greenish lump has been tied to enough greed, drama and intrigue to rival any Agatha Christie mystery including two unsolved killings and a court fight that ended with one of the largest jury awards of its type in state history.

Appraisers have valued the pearl at $60 million, Lowenstein said.

"It's not the wrong type of people," said Barbish, the pearl's majority owner. "It has a size limit. It was made to do something good, apparently, but what it's been doing—it's been terrible."

Barbish said he kept the pearl in a Denver bank vault and safe deposit boxes over the years, but he won't disclose its present location, even though he'd like to unleash the gem to a museum or a library.

Now the pearl wound up in Colorado is quite a tale...accentuordinary one if owners are to be believed. It purportedly started as an amulet of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, said to have carried his last and those of Confucius and Buddha on its surface.

It was then plucked in extraordinarily larger clams

(STORY: B1)

GOING SOFT, PLAYING SAFE

Major players elude gov't drive against illegal logging in Aurora

By Luz Rimban
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

(Storyline para)

AT A wedding late last year, the bride and the groom became the privileged godchildren of a high government official who was one of their many sponsors.

The event would have passed unnoticed, except that the padrino was Environment Secretary Michael Defensor and the Chinese-Filipino father-in-law owned a company that had its tree-harvesting operations suspended by Defensor's immediate predecessor at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The suspension was imposed on Tejero Lumber Corp., owned by the Chua family, in 2003, after an investigation revealed that it had been cutting trees beyond its designated area. Earlier, Tejero had been granted an Integrated Forestry Management Agreement (IFMA), with a permit to cut down an 8,000 hectares of land in Aurora.

An action had been taken on Tejero's appeal for a lifting of the suspension order until the time of Defensor's wife, after he became DENR chief last September, had agreed to stand as godfather at the wedding. Sometime after the Chua nuptials, a timber ban was later linked to logging in Aurora and neighboring provinces, leaving towns buried in mud, tens of thousands of people homeless, and some 1,500 people either dead or missing.

Tejero is one of only five firms holding timber and forestry permits in Aurora. It has appeared in environmental groups' list of alleged violators of forestry laws. Yet it has so far escaped investigation for its complicity in the recent tragedy which many people, including government officials, have blamed on "illegal logging."

DENR officials say the lack of official interest in Tejero does not surprise them. Blood is big business, after all, and lumber and logging lions

(STORY: A12)

MISS CHINESE INT'L Filipina candidate Mary Grace Go-Ty (right), 21, performs with illuminated hats along with other contestants during Saturday's preliminary stage of the Miss Chinese International beauty pageant in Hong Kong.

Special fund eyed for pre-need firms

By Christine O. Avendaño and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A SPECIAL fund, similar to the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp., is being proposed for the pre-need industry to compensate affected policy holders in the wake of the financial troubles facing College Assurance Plan Phil. Inc., the country's largest pre-need provider.

Sen. Mar Roxas said yesterday he has filed Senate Bill No. 2056 proposing the creation of the Planholders Protection Fund to protect the interests of policyholders affected by the closure or collapse of pre-need firms.

Under his bill, planholders of a bankrupt pre-need firm may claim up to P100,000 each from the fund which shall pay claims within six months of filing.

At present, planholders of pre-need firms have no means of recovering any of the money they invested in the event these firms collapse. The bill seeks to address this problem, Roxas said.

In a statement, Roxas said the woeful failures of the Planholders Protection Fund is similar to the concept behind the creation of the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp., which extends protection to bank depositors.

Pre-need firms shall be initially required to raise about P1 million each to the fund, according to Roxas' bill.

A contribution fund of one half of one percent of total payments made on existing plans shall be remitted quarterly to the fund. Any income generated by the fund shall remain with the fund.

Roxas filed the bill in response to the controversy now plaguing CAP which has over 700,000 planholders whose education may depends on the successful operations of the pre-need firm.

Roxas earlier urged the public to disconnect paying the administrators of their CAP plans.

Three Senate committees are set hold hearings this week on the financial woes of CAP following a privilege speech last week by Sen. Sergio Osmeña III who disclosed that the pre-need firm was bankrupt and should stop selling new plans and collecting payment on existing ones.

The Securities and Exchange Commission suspended CAP's license to sell educational plans last year.

On Sept. 30 last year, a SEC oversight committee recommended the closure of CAP after it was found to be insolvent.

SEC chair Perfecto Yasay, however, ignored the recommendation due to its possible adverse implications on CAP's planholders nationwide.

"If we close it (CAP), planholders would be at the losing end. At the end of the day, planholders would still have no money to pay tuition fees," Yasay said.

Yesterday, Mahanlahay backed SEC's decision not to close CAP down.

"We have to follow the proper process, if not we will have instability in our institutions," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye at an interview over DZRH radio.

Bunye assured the public that the government was not disregarding the complaints aired by CAP beneficiaries. "He will let the SEC do its job and handle all complaints on this matter," Bunye said.

Yasay has decided to give CAP more time to find new investors that would pump more capital into the company instead of pulling the plug on the firm as recommended by the oversight committee.

CAP is currently in talks with First America Investments of the United States for a $200 million loan to pay off its planholders.

It has also proposed to increase its capital from P500 million to P8 billion through a property-for-share swap involving 9% billion worth of CAP shares for 2,000 hectares of property in two provinces owned by Green Circle and Green Square Properties of the Sotto group.

CAP has also assured its planholders that it would honor all its obligations.

Roll back hiked water rates, urge consumers

By Edwin C. Tandoc Jr.

CONSUMER groups asked the National Water Resources Board on Friday to declare the rate increase granted Maynilad by the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System as "invalid, unjustified and illegal."

The Lopez-owned Maynilad Water Services, which provides water to the west zone in Metro Manila, increased its rates from P19.92 to P30.18 per cubic meter this year.

Through a complaint, the groups also asked the NWRB to order a refund of payments already made since the rate increase was implemented on Jan. 1.

Maynilad corporate communication officer Jess Mendoza said the rate hike was necessary in "help to cope with the foreign exchange losses and shake the company more stable."

Sumvar Tuling spokesperson Jude Esguerra, who helped the groups file their complaint, said the rate increase would give Maynilad an "unauthorized income of about P2.5 million every month."

In their complaint, the petitioners said the increase violated several procedures.

They alleged that Maynilad had not fulfilled one of the six conditions like the payment of concession fees the MWSS had faced to a resolution allowing the Lopez-owned concession to increase rates.

Maynilad and MWSS did not hold any public consultation for the rate hike, the groups added.

The groups also said that MWSS had even legal basis to grant Maynilad any increase because "it had already terminated Maynilad's contract."

The MWSS Regulatory Office had earlier issued a Notice of Concession Fees Termination in 2000, the groups added.

With the new rate fully implemented, families using 121 cubic meters of water every month would have to pay P99.56 more (from P75.23 to P189.79) monthly, a table from Sumvar Tuling showed.

Residential consumers using 30 cubic meters would shell out P36.08 more (from P117.12 to P476). Higher rates would apply to business establishments.

"The real intention behind the approval of the tariff is to bail out the financially bankrupt Maynilad," the groups said in a press statement.

Mendoza denied this.

Other groups had earlier asked the government to terminate the contract of Maynilad.

In a press conference yesterday, leaders of the groups also lambasted Maynilad's inefficient service.

Cop says medal has nothing to do with botched raid

A RANKING lawman a co-accuser the Philippine National Police's internal highest award today but he said the citation had nothing to do with his participation in the controversial raid on a Muslim resort that led to the arrest of 17 suspected terrorists earlier this month.

"The award is not based on the operation, which I, in fact, did not lead," former Supt. Federico Lacsina said. "It was based on my other accomplishments in criminal investigation."

Lacsina said his unit, the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-National Capital Region Field Unit, did participate in the raid, but only "as a support unit, just like the Western Police District."

The raid, which netted the Muslim community was in fact led by the CIDG's Criminal Investigation and Detection Division headed by Supt. Augusto Gatpatan and Task Force Wisdom of Senior Supt. Eliseo Bacolo, Lacsina said.

Police claimed to have found homemade bombs and weapons during the raid just before the celebration of Quiapo's Feast of the Black Nazarene and that five of the 17 people detained belonged to a terrorist group called "Hukbong Ekalid Terrorist," purveda clandestine movement seeking to convert Christians to Islam and use them to carry out terror activities.

Some of those detained and later released accused the police of planting the evidence. Muslims were also outraged that the police must entered a praying room without taking off their shoes. Christian U. Esguerra

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Solon, workers score new GMA appointees

By Carlito Pablo

A LAWMAKER yesterday urged Malacañang to recall the appointments of Alberto Lina as the new commissioner of the Bureau of Customs.

Rep. Joseph Santiago (NPC, Catanduanes) said Lina, a brother of former Interior Secretary Jose Lina, is not "suitable for the post due to potential conflicts of interest."

Santiago said Lina was the chair of Interfreight 2000 Inc., a licensee of Federal Express Philippines Inc., and other firms with "regular transactions with the BOC."

These firms include U-Freight Philippines Inc., Cargohaus Inc., Customs Broker Inc. and D-Connection.

Lina will replace Commissioner George Abaya who is retiring on Feb. 21.

"It would not be appropriate for someone so intimately identified with so many private companies that routinely conduct business with the BOC to head that agency," Santiago said.

He suggested that Finance Secretary-designate Cesar Purisima should instead be allowed to pick a new commissioner for the BOC, an agency under the Department of Finance.

Rep. Abraham Mitra (LP, Palawan) earlier recommended the appointment of former Sen. Wigberto Tañada as the BOC, an agency which Tañada headed after the 1986 Edsa revolt.

Meanwhile, workers in Southern Tagalog expressed outrage over the appointment of Jose "Pit" Inciong as the new trade secretary, calling the official "a notorious union buster."

Ilocindo Bobiles, chair of Pagkakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Timog Katagalugan (Pamak-SMM), said the country's workers would face a bleak future with Inciong as the new head of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Soriano, who is president of the workers union at the Nestlé Cabuyao plant, described Inciong during his term as the first Filipino president of the Swiss-owned Nestlé Philippines Inc. as "well-experienced in penalizing unionmembers and in practicing anti-worker policies to the extent of using criminal means just as he did to workers in Southern Tagalog and in other regions," he said.

He added that under Inciong's management, thousands of workers were scrunched in various Nestlé plants in the Philippines.

"If he had blatantly violated a Supreme Court ruling, favoring the exclusion of retirement benefits in the Nestlé workers' CBA, then he would also deprive the whole working class of the same privileges on a national scale," Soriano said.

In a statement, Akbayan! party-list Rep. Crespin Behrman said he would file a petition at the Commission on Appointments against Inciong's appointment. With Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Phil Southern Luzon Bureau

Guingona son is no 'papa's boy'

IT WON'T be a case of "like father, like son" for Rep. Teofisto Guingona III (LDP, Bukidnon).

Guingona said he would remain with the opposition in the House of Representatives even though his father, former Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr., has rejoined the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The elder Guingona, who supported the late Fernando Poe Jr. in the last presidential election and had been at odds with the President over policy issues, accepted the post of Philippine ambassador to China.

"No, definitely not," the young Guingona said when asked if he would cross over to the administration-coalition in the House.

"My better role is in finalizing government policies and directions," Guingona said.

He said he did not see any conflict in remaining with the opposition while his father worked for the administration.

"My father's post is an ambassadorship. It would have been somewhat different if he accepted a Cabinet-level post like department secretary," Guingona said. Carlito Pablo

Family planning drive sans pills won't work, say critics

By Blanche S. Rivera

"IT'S JUST a waste of money."

Three weeks before its scheduled launching nationwide, the Department of Health's P 186-million Ligtas Tayo campaign is being questioned by population management advocates who see an novel for it.

Mercedes Concepcion, a commissioner of the DOH-attached agency Commission on Population, said the planned door-to-door campaign on family planning would only lead to more frustrated couples whose need for contraceptives could not be met by the government.

"It won't work if you just come along with out the supplies. You will only create a demand and end up with a lot of frustrated couples," Concepcion said at a recent forum hosted by the Philippine Press Institute.

"They think the family planning information would be analogous to the DOH's efforts to provide immunization... but unlike polio, family planning is not addressed with one drug," she said.

The Ligtas-Tayo campaign is a take-off from the DOH's immunization promotion campaigns in the past such as the successful Ligtas Tigdas last year.

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit said some 15,000 barangay health workers assisted by volunteers from nongovernment organizations and party-list groups would be deployed on Feb. 21 for the door-to-door Ligtas-Tayo Oral campaign.

The month-long campaign would be held in coordination with local governments, but follow-up or monitoring of its effectiveness would not be measured until the next national survey.

"What do you hope to accomplish by going house to house? What is the point? You will just go back on the same old issue, which is a high unmet need," Philippine Center for Population and Development executive director Paulina Camacho-Reyes said.

She stressed the need to equip the health workers involved in the campaign not just with commodities but with the proper training to educate couples who prefer natural family planning methods.

The MTF which the government is promoting, for responsible parenthood, has not been very popular because of its inconvenience. Studies also showed that only 28 percent of women in Luzon relies they were fertile.

"If they are (biologically successful) with the campaign, what do you do with couples who want to practice artificial methods? Do they have the people who will teach couples who prefer MTF? Is the system ready to respond? You will only bring (the unmet need higher) if there are no services or support," Reyes said.

Reyes said the campaign has raised more questions than answers, adding the whole event would be a waste without the necessary support services.

She said she wouldn't believe the health chief did not foresee these problems before announcing the kick-off of Ligtas Tayo.

Dayrit assured the public that barangay health workers participating in the campaign would bring along pills and other available contraceptives worth P 800-million.

Conflict on VAT bill shakes Joker's group

From page A1

the influential bloc within the majority in the upper chamber, yesterday disclosed that he was supporting the proposal to increase the rate of the value-added tax (VAT) from 10 percent to 12 percent.

Pangilinan's stand runs counter to the position taken by Arroyo and Senators Manuel Villar and Ralph Recto—the other members of the group.

Enunciating Malacañang's stand, Pangilinan said that while a VAT increase might not be pro-poor, it would help stave off a fiscal crisis.

"Under normal circumstances, I would oppose increasing the VAT as it perpetuates an unequal tax structure, and the tax burden will be clearly felt by the ordinary citizen," he said.

But he said the country would need to swallow the bitter pill to avert a fiscal crisis which, according to him, would adversely affect the poor.

Pangilinan clarified his position on the increase in the VAT rate following media reports that he was against it because he had said that the P208.1 billion in uncollected VAT from 1998 to 2002 should be addressed first.

In clarifying his position, the young senator may be trying to distance himself from the group that sheltered him from the day he first set foot in the chamber in 2001.

He is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, said a well-placed Senate source.

On the one hand, he has to toe the line of Malacañang which was instrumental in his being elected majority leader. As such, he is expected to speak on behalf of administration senators even if he does not agree with the official position all the time.

On the other, Pangilinan is politically indebted to Senator Arroyo, a veteran lawmaker, and the rest of the group that meets every Wednesday (Vice President Noli de Castro was a member when he was still a senator).

Power struggle

Villar earlier admitted that since 2001, the group had played a crucial role in maintaining President Arroyo's dominance in the chamber.

Every time the minority tried to rock the boat, the group was always waiting in the wings, ready to come to the aid of Senate President Franklin Drilon, he said.

Besides ensuring that the administration bloc has a tight grip on the Senate leadership, the group acts as a watchdog of sorts within the majority by blocking administration measures that could adversely affect the public, according to Villar.

But things changed when Pangilinan joined the Liberal Party. He later became its vice chair, while Drilon was elected LP president.

Senator Arroyo has officially taken a stand against any VAT increase, rebuking Drilon last week for claiming that the majority would support the bill.

Energy sector

Arroyo said the solution to the cash-flow problems of the government lies within the "grossly mismanaged" energy sector, which currently enjoys hefty tax holidays.

"Look at the picture. Since the 13th Congress convened last July 2004, it has not enacted any significant legislation. It is stuck with tax measures which has preoccupied it since then," he said.

Arroyo said that in passing the tax measures espoused by Malacañang, "Congress has abdicated its constitutional primacy to lay down policy on economic matters and it has yielded that to Moody's and company." Moody's is an international credit rating agency.

Villar and Recto, chair of the Senate committees on finance and on ways and means, respectively, said the fiscal problems of the government could be solved within the executive branch itself.

Efficient collection

They believe that plugging loopholes in VAT collections and increasing the revenue collection efficiency of the government, which currently stands at a measly 12 percent (of gross domestic product), are doable if the President exercises enough political will to crack the whip on revenue and customs officials.

Pangilinan, however, "guaranteed" that an increased VAT would not have to burden the taxpayer indefinitely.

"It can be a temporary measure that should last for only a maximum of three to five years. This sunset provision can help soothe the burden and allay fears of ordinary citizens," he said.

During the three- to five-year period, Congress must remove all tax exemptions, he said.

Efforts to ease world hunger off track—report

By Ingrid M. Yambot
Publisher

DAVOS, Switzerland—If present trends continue, almost 600 million people will go hungry in 2015, by more than the projected 400 million, the Global Governance Initiative Annual Report said.

The report, submitted to the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum on Monday, urged the heads of state to the World Food Summit in 1996 to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger—currently at about 800 million—by half by 2015. The deadline for the Millennium Development Goals is also 2015.

Optimistic. The target was to reduce the proportion of people with incomes less than $1 a day by 50 percent between 1990 and 2015, from 28 to 14 percent (a central Millennium Development Goal).

Less than $1 a day

The report was made by a panel headed by Aasraj Aziz, former finance and foreign ministers of Pakistan, and Joachim von Braun, director general of the International Food Policy Research Institute.

The low scores given by the report indicate that the world is not on track to meet the poverty and hunger targets.

To reach the goal of reducing the number of hunger people to 400 million by 2015, the current pace of hunger reduction would have to be accelerated more than 12 times.

"Barring a paradigm shift, this scenario will not materialize," the report said.

The report said the total number of people surviving on less than $1 a day has grown down by only 12 million in the last decade, leaving more than one billion in absolute poverty.

Latin America and the Caribbean are no decrease in the number of people living in absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe, the situation has deteriorated significantly, the report said.

Poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean, the West Bank and North America was forecast to be minimal, if present trends continue. In sub-Saharan Africa, the poverty rate was expected to continue at a staggering 41 percent.

Only in Asia

Only South Asia and East Asia were projected to reduce the incidence of poverty significantly by 2015.

The report called on governments to increase investments in clean water, sanitation and healthcare. It also stressed the need for improving governance, promoting human freedom between the farmers of developing countries and industrialized nations, reducing the debt burden of heavily indebted poor nations, providing safety nets for poor households and reforming agriculture.

The report stressed the role that the private sector could play, not just by giving aid but by investing in markets in developing countries.

The Global Governance Initiative, which issued the report, was created by the World Economic Forum.

"In 2004, world leaders made progress [in the effort to reduce hunger and poverty levels] only in words and planning," Ban Ki-moon said. He added that 2009 has to be a year of concerted action if the world is to come anywhere near reaching the goals by 2015.

'One-size-fits-all'

Last Wednesday, an update report on poverty noted that the "rapid, top-down, North-imposed one-size-fits-all" strategy to reduce poverty was starting to flunk.

"We had the Washington Consensus which called for stability, liberalization and privatization," said David T. Ellwood, dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. "But we haven't made much progress over the last decade, which is a cause for pessimism. Even where we had those three conditions, like Latin America, there were no success stories. So our challenge today is: What comes next?"

The panelists saw economic growth as the key driver of poverty reduction throughout the world, but they acknowledged that growth alone was not enough to lessen long-term equity and social cohesion.

Cyclical growth

Christopher Colclough, director of the Center for Commonwealth Education of Cambridge University, said: "Growth is cyclical. We can't project the strong past rates years to 2015, the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals."

He also noted that growth is uneven, and that there are enormous pockets of extreme wealth and extreme poverty within a single region or nation. As a measure of progress, it only makes sense when applied, as with China, when seen in a macro context, he added.

NGO backs new Japan policy on entertainer visa

By TJ Burgonio

AFTER facing tough opposition in Manila over its decision to do something about the trafficking in young Filipino women, the Japanese government has finally found an ally in a local women's human rights organization.

The Development Action for Women Network (Dawn), which has criticized the Philippine government to put a stop to the trafficking for years now, described Japan's new policy designed to regulate the entry of Filipino entertainers into that country as "a dream come true."

"It's a dream come true for us, we've been lobbying for it for the last nine years. We hope the Japanese government will stand by its decision," said Dawn executive director Carmelita Nuqui in an interview.

"We support the Japanese immigration policy because for us, any elimination, any measure of extension, means more women having freedom bodies and shattered dreams," Nuqui said, citing figures that 90 percent of the women were forced into prostitution.

Brushing aside appeals for a reconsideration, the Japanese government last October said that its policy was "final" and that it was merely waiting for its battle-country to finalize the supplementary rules and regulations before enforcing it.

Under the new measure, Japan will require Filipinos to present proof of a two-year training in music, dance or singing or two years' entertainment experience outside Japan before they would be issued a entertainer visa.

Previously, it only required the Philippine government to issue a certification of an entertainer's skills in the form of an artist record book and, recently, an artist accreditation card.

The government, as well as the entertainers and their managers, had sought a measure fearing the policy would displace the thousands of Filipino entertainers now in Japan and cut off a major source of foreign exchange remittances.

The Japanese Embassy issues an average of 80,000 entertainer visas a year.

"It's sad that the government is missing the point. It's merely looking at the dollar remittances without addressing the social cost to the women and their children," Nuqui said.

Court steno would rather be caregiver

ALL SHE wanted was to make a better future for her family.

So much so that when an opportunity came to work in the United Arab Emirates, stenographer Raquel Bautista left her job at the Cotabato (Mindanao) Municipal Trial Court without getting the proper authorization from her superiors, thus earning the ire of the Supreme Court.

In a 10-page ruling on Jan. 13, the high tribunal chastised Bautista for abandoning her post to work as a caregiver in Dubai.

The court said Bautista had when she claimed that she was remaining in the country when she went on vacation. She also failed to get a clearance to leave the country.

And in her hurry to fly to her new job, Bautista failed to submit the transcripts of seven criminal cases she was supposed to transcribe, the court said.

"The alleged urgency of her job abroad is no justification for her dishonest conduct which has no place in the judiciary," the tribunal said.

The high court ordered the forfeiture of all her benefits and privileges, except accrued leave credits, and barred her from future employment in the government.

Court records showed Bautista applied for a leave in October 2003 and from November 2003 to January 2004.

Her immediate superior, Judge Luis Enriquez Reyes, approved her leave after reminding her to finish the transcripts of the cases assigned to her.

"[Reyes] was surprised when he learned that [Bautista] had already left the country [on Oct. 18, 2003], considering that her application for leave had stated that she would be spending her vacation in the Philippines," the tribunal said.

Bautista said she decided to work overseas "to give her family a better future" and that she was not able to secure the required clearances because she was "urgently needed" at her new job.

Philip C. Tubeza

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ENTOM

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2005

Recall VAT bill–Joker

offices are expected to vote heavy with the opposition in rejecting the bill.

"I would like to appeal to our senators to stay the course with me on the VAT issue as the crucial point in our economy. There can never be a better time to demonstrate our enlightened leadership to liberate the poor from cruel, lowly and living forever in lasting prosperity," the President said in a rare statement issued on her vacation.

She issued the statement after Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile claimed that the VAT increase would be unfavorable to the masses.

Enrile said at least four administration senators—Aquino, Manuel Villar, Francis Pangilinan and Ralph Recto—would join the nine member opposition in shooting down the bill. The Jose on Jan. 23 members.

But Pangilinan issued a statement yesterday that he was supporting the bill. (See story on Page A1.)

"I respect the views of the senators and I know their noble intentions. But we have gained clear momentum in our fiscal reforms and we must not turn back the clock of urgent change," the President said. "I trust in the wisdom and statesmanship of our senators to hold our houses higher for the future generations of Filipinos."

Along with the President's statement, Malacañang released a copy of Singhasari's statement.

Recto said yesterday he was keeping an open mind on proposals to amend the VAT to reduce its regressive nature.

Recto said he was prepared to consider the reforms provided the changes would include restoring the exemptions granted basic goods and power commodities.

Exhaustive open hearings

Today the Senate ways and means committee chaired by Sen. Ralph Recto is expected to open public hearings on the proposed VAT rate increase.

Recto said the committee hearings would be "exhaustive and open."

"The earlier will be left out," Recto said in a statement. "We have invited sugar planters, millers, drip owners, market vendors. We will be inviting retailers and retailers, tuipan and owners to "impactment for poor."

Invited to today's hearing were newly named Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, Economic Planning Secretary Romy Neri and leaders of consumer groups, including that of Raul Concepcion.

Recto said 600 groups should not only oppose but also propose. "If VAT is unpalatable, then what is your alternative?" he said.

Conscience votes

At the end of the debates, Senator Arroyo expects that "there will be a lot of conscience votes within the majority."

Senate President Franklin Drilon said he hoped those opposed to the measure would "keep an open mind and come up with alternative measures" on how government could solve its fiscal problems.

"I respect the views of my colleagues and I am willing to listen to alternative proposals," Drilon said in a statement.

He said he was open to ideas on how lawmakers could prevent the VAT from being passed on to the consumers.

He said the people should not be burdened with more taxes in these difficult times but he noted that even he supported increasing the exemption to P60 billion a year.

Critics warned that failure by Congress and the executive department to come up with measures to raise revenues would hurt the poor in the long-term. "Period," as it is, a discomforting scenario could bring many harm to the economy and to the people."

So far, Congress has passed two of eight tax measures that aim to raise P88 billion a year. These are the excise tax on alcohol and tobacco products and the income declaration act, which provides a missed and penalty system for tax collecting agencies.

The VAT bill, which the House passed on first and final reading last week, is expected to raise about P70 billion.

In the House, the chair of the appropriations committee warned that a female rejection of the bill raising the VAT rate and other house approved tax measures would jeopardize the funding requirements of the still pending 2005 budget measure and jolt up government borrowings.

"The Senate will be passing a partially unfunded budget if it does not pass the tax measures which the House has sent to the Senate for its consideration," Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr. (LD, Camarines Sur) said. "The 2005 budget is premised on the adoption of revenue measures." Christine O. Avendaño, CII C. Cabe. contribute Jr. and Cyrille Pablo

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Daring rescue of POWs during WWII recalled

By Arnaldine Roque
PEP Central Luzon Desk

CABANATUAN CITY—Though not as elaborate as the celebration of other World War II events, the 60th anniversary of what was recognized as the "most daring and successful rescue mission in military history" was commemorated here on Sunday.

The rescue mission, staged on Jan. 30, 1945, at the Cabanatuan concentration camp in Barangay Pangatian here, liberated 513 American prisoners of war.

Over 400 Filipino guerrilla fighters from Nueva Ecija participated in the rescue. Thousands of civilians from the province also participated in various ways.

The Pentagon camp, 30 km east of the city proper, was more than 6,000 sqm in size and surrounded by a barbed wire fence.

The camp—the mobilization and training camp of the Philippine Army before the war—was taken over by Japanese soldiers and used as a concentration camp for allied POWs.

It was said to be the biggest concentration camp of the Japanese imperial army at the time.

At least 5,000 POWs died there due to malnutrition, dysentery and other ailments, and from severe beatings by Japanese soldiers.

During the one-day service attended by war veterans and their relatives attending Gov. Tomas Joson III said he was happy the liberation of Pangatian was being recognized not only in the Philippines but throughout the world.

One of those who participated in the rescue was Joson's father, the late Gov. Eduardo Joson. The elder Joson, then a captain and leader of Squadron 11 of the guerrilla fighters, and Capt. Juan Pajota, carried out the mission.

The current governor said he learned about the "guarantees" only through the book "Classic Soldiers" by Hampton Sides. The American author was one of the guests during the program.

Joson said he hoped the rescue would be widely publicized through the Hollywood-produced movie in "The Great Raid" which is expected to be shown soon in the Philippines.

In the movie, lead actor Cesar Montano played the part of Pajota.

A triumvirate showcasing the liberation of Pangatian and exhibiting memorabilia from the war and the struggles of the Filipino and allied forces was also unveiled here yesterday.

In 2003, the road was given the recognition and was acknowledged as "one of the most daring and successful rescue missions of its type in the annals of military history."

Executive secretary Eduardo Ermita, who represented President Macapagal-Arroyo, was the guest of honor at yesterday's program.

TWO VETERANS of the 276th US Army band rehearse before the start of yesterday's rites marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Pangatian concentration camp. Behind them is the memorial wall bearing the names of the POWs who died at the camp.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Monday, January 31, 2005
4th Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: Heb 11:32-40
Gospel: Mark 5:1-20

Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes. No sooner did Jesus leave the boat than he was met by a man with evil spirits who had come from the tombs. He lived among the tombs and no one could restrain him, even with a chain. He had often been bound with fetters and chains but he would pull the chains apart and smash the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. Night and day he stayed among the tombs and the hillsides, and was continually screaming and hurting himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from afar he ran and fell at his feet and cried with a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? We (he's one) beg you, do not torture me." The reason Jesus had commanded, "Come out of the man, evil spirit." And when he was asked him, "What is your name?" he replied, "Legion is my name, for we are many." And all of them kept begging Jesus not to send them out of that region.

Now, a great herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside, and the evil spirits begged him, "Send us to the pigs and let us go into them." So Jesus let them go. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs, and immediately the herd rushed down the cliff and all were drowned in the lake. The herdsmen fled, and reported this in the town and in the countryside, so all the people came to see what had happened.

They came to Jesus and saw the man freed of the evil spirits sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had been possessed by the legion. They were afraid. And (also those who had seen it told what had happened to the man and to the pigs. So people begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

When Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to stay with him. Jesus would not let him and said, "Go home to your people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you (and how he has had mercy on you." So he went throughout the country of Decapolis telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were astonished.

Commentary:

A man who lived among the tombs, said, has to be restrained, more dead than alive when identity is taken. This exception to our power and freedom and placed him to be disregarded. Jesus demands that they come out of the tomb and they live their life. Word into a herd of pigs that then rush headlong over a cliff drowning in the lake below. The manic subdued and sitting at the person and many and all who see and hear are afraid enchanted more violent, and the man, wanting to stay to save home or preach the Good News does for him and show forth the glory of God.

This is Mark's gospel and she begins a Rome, Jesus' followers and power, for Jesus you will demand that all that make people but to chains, more dead than alive and without hope. Jesus' Evil cannot stand and is overpowered by Jesus' truth and another by The choice is to be freed or to live with. Mark: They tell the Romans, but those those freed are sent to release others for their lives converted, and made whole by Jesus' presence in the world.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

GENERAL LAW (CIVIL PROCEDURE)—Only one appeal permitted—Petitioner should have availed of the ordinary appeal process such as certiorari, prohibition or mandamus. Petitioner filed motion to dismiss of the Solicitor General, a motion for Certiorari cannot be a substitute for the lost or lapsed remedy of appeal, such that it is contended by the petitioner's own neglect or error in the choice of remedies. Petitioner's recourse to certiorari to the appellate court did not extend to grave abuse of discretion amounting to excess or lack of jurisdiction absolving the petition for lack of jurisdiction. Petitioner undeniably pursued the wrong remedy when it filed a petition for certiorari before the appellate court. Well settled is the rule that the court cannot acquire jurisdiction over the subject matter of a case, unless the docket fee are paid. And where the filing of the petition pending is not accompanied by payment of the docket fee, the court may dismiss the petition or may allow the petitioner to pay the fee within a reasonable time but in no case beyond the applicable prescriptive or reglementary period. (Ty-Delgado Realty Development, Inc. vs. Court of Appeals, G.R. No. 130302, November 6, 1998) 353 S. 461

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Int'l group slams government on media slays

Reinhardt story

Perseus should not be quite official as Committee Beats PNP director Senior Supt. Elvis Velez. She said Velez later claimed his statement, reported by made in December, had been retold in jest.

"But this month, he again made a similar statement," Perseus said. "When he was introducing the new police chief of Mindanao, Allan he was quoted as saying, 'The official name from Manila. When he gets hit by the media, he kills them.'"

Perseus also said that when a person as prominent and influential as former President Joseph Estrada could openly insinuate violence against media, "it is cause for alarm."

Chilling effect

Estrada said early this month that the Inquirer "taught its news after ABS-CBN," whose broadcast arm was ratched allegedly by supporters of his late friend Fernando Poe Jr. angered by the giant television network's news reports. Estrada later said he was only kidding.

Noonan said that while journalists were not the only ones being killed in the Philippines, "any encouragement toward the culture of violence has an effect far wider in the field of journalism and freedom of the press."

Such violence has "a chilling effect" on working journalists and their practice, he said.

"The IFJ considers this matter as one of utmost seriousness," he added.

Extrajudicial killings

The mission visited the cities of General Santos in Mindanao, Iloilo and Cebu in the Visayas, and Legazpi in Bicol last week.

Its members included Noonan, Indonesian journalist Bantarto Bandoro Mandatjoan of Indonesia's Tempo Magazine, MLSP secretary general Carlos Conde, Nepali and Ms. Diana Lahiner, MLSP national director who is also a Women Feminists editorial committee and Indonesia correspondent.

Conde said the newspapers the mission was reporting to were Davao City Mayor Rodolfo Duterte and Cebu City Mayor Tomas Osmeña.

Walde from Davao, cities in Mindanao that have an expert issue with corruption of killings are Cagayan de Oro, Bugadian and Gumboro," Conde told reporters.

Pressure on judges

The mission also deplored that only one conviction had been obtained by families of victims, out of the more than 10 to 60 journalists killed since democracy was restored in the country after the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

Noonan said the mission would prepare a detailed report on its findings and recommendations which would be presented to the IFJ executive next month.

The recommendations would include a call by the IFJ for the International Court of Justice of National Judiciaries to pressure the Philippine justice system to come up with more convictions of killers of journalists.

The mission is also recommending salary training and provisions for better working conditions and compensation for Filipino journalists.

Poorly paid journalists

MLSP chair Inday Espina-Varona said poor working conditions in the industry made journalists more vulnerable to attacks.

"The vast numbers of journalists are receiving a pittance or nothing at all for their work. They are being exploited and sometimes forced into conflict-of-interest situations," said Varona.

Iraq was the deadliest place for journalists with 49 deaths last year, the IFJ said earlier this month. The Philippines was second with 11, and India third, with seven.

36 killed in Iraq poll attacks

Front page A1

ish in power she had voted.

In one sign of potential trouble, polls in four were closed-in mostly Sunni cities like Fallujah, Ramadi and Samarra around Baghdad, and in the narrow, heavily Sunni northern city of Mosul.

By midday, however, hundreds of people were voting in Samarra and several hundred people were voting on Mosul's eastern side, which includes both Kurdish and Arab neighborhoods, witnesses said.

There were still big parties with heavy turnout in Baghdad's heavily Sunni area of Adamiyah, the neighborhood's four polling centers did not open Sunday, witnesses said. In Beji, a Sunni area just outside Kurdish northern Iraq, polling centers were all but deserted.

Turnout good

The chief UN adviser to the Iraqi election commission, Carlos Valenzuela, said turnout seemed to be good in most places, although he cautioned it was too early to know for sure.

He said there were some voters in Fallujah and Ramadi.

"There have been a number of attacks of course, as expected," Valenzuela said.

But he said: "These attacks have not scuppered the operation."

Many if reports of better than-expected turnout in areas where Sunni and Shiite Muslims live together indicated that a Sunni-boycott effort had failed, one of the main groups pushing the boycott seemed subdued.

"The association's call for a boycott of the elections was not a human [religious ruling], but only a statement," said Association of Muslim Scholars spokesperson Omar Baghdi. "It was never a question of something religiously prohibited or perverted. We never sought to [take] people to hell."

Across Iraq, jet broke out explosions on the day were on. At one polling place in Baghdad, Iraqi soldiers and voters joined hands in a dance.

One polling site in Baghdad was out of ballots and was trying to get more, US officials said.

Another in western Baghdad, according to a report is a black ski mask rushed for AK-47 assault rifle under one arm and held the hand of an elderly blind woman to guide her to the polls.

Suicide missions

A driving ban seemed to discourage car bombs. But the insurgents improvised. Several used belts of explosives rather than cars rigged with bombs to launch their suicide missions.

In the most deadly attack, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a polling station in western Baghdad, killing himself, three policemen and a civilian, officials said. Witness Saleh Hussein said the bomber approached a line of voters and detonated as explosives belt.

In a second suicide attack at a polling station, a bomber blew up himself, one policeman and two Iraqi soldiers. In a third suicide attack at a school in western Baghdad, three people and the bomber died, police said.

And in a fourth attack, at another school in western Baghdad, a suicide bomber killed himself and at least three others, another four people died in other suicide attacks.

Also, a suicide bomber blew himself up near the home of Iraq's justice minister in western Baghdad in an apparent assassination attempt. The minister was not home but the attack killed one person, an interior ministry official said.

In addition, three people were killed when mortars landed near a polling station in Sadr City, the home of Baghdad's Shiite Muslim community. Two others died when a mortar round hit a home in Amiel, and a policeman died in a mortar attack on a polling station in Khan al-Mahawil, south of Baghdad.

The heavy attacks started about 8:30 a.m., less than two hours after voting began, in Baghdad and cities including Baquba, Hawia, Mosul and Samarra. They eased around noon.

Even as the attacks raged nearby, voters turned out in large numbers in the poor Shiite community of Jan Diyala in eastern Baghdad, with the number of voters increasing as the morning wore on.

"I don't have a job. I hope the new government will give me a job," said one voter, Rasha Ajaab, 35, a former lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi force.

"I voted for the rule of law," Ajaab said of the reasons his vote. AP

The group said the world's tenth death toll of 129 was the highest since it began keeping records in the 1990s.

The MLSP is documenting the cases of media people murdered and is working to pressure the government to reopen many of them.

Europe: Report 'misleading'

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunyan earlier this month described a report "misleading" the IFJ claims that the Philippine was one of the world's most dangerous countries for reporters.

Bunyan said the "majority of the cases involving the slaying of journalists have been solved by a special task force. ..."

The MLSP said Bunyan's definition of "solved" merely meant a suspect had been identified in the murders, not that the killer had been caught or convicted.

The Philippines has prided itself on having one of the freest presses in Asia, but the freedom has come with a stiff price.

Alarmed by the mounting toll of journalists killed, Ms Arroyo last year raised to P1 million from P1 million the cash bounty for information leading to the arrest of the killers.

The President announced the offer in August while relatives of slain Radio Veritas correspondent Fernando Consignado were hanging him in Laguna.

"If there are any threats to press freedom, they must be stopped," she had said.

Seven more journalists have fallen from assassins' bullets since then.

The IFJ mission's findings echoed similar apprehensions previously voiced by the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists formed to help journalists killed or attacked in the line of duty.

The Fund said in November that a "culture of impunity" had allowed killers of media people to roam free.

"Where the press is easily silenced, communities are deprived of the means to create a public forum that connects them with one another. Where the press is weak or abject, the people cannot complain about the lack of public services, about abusive or erring public officials," it said. With reports from AP, AFP

Singapore treating OFWs better

(FURTHER) known for its enforcement of foreign maids, the city-state of Singapore is turning out to be a favorable destination for overseas Filipino workers looking to lift their families out of poverty or misery.

The Department of Labor and Employment yesterday cited Singapore for implementing new measures to protect foreign workers from abusive employers.

Labor Undersecretary Manuel Imson said Singapore, one of the top 10 employers of OFWs, recently created a Foreign Manpower Division to ensure the welfare of legally employed foreigners.

The unit, which is under the Ministry of Manpower, is tasked to protect foreign workers, improve performance among employment agencies and strengthen employment enforcement by conducting spot checks on employers of foreigners.

"The MOM has put in place remedial measures to look into and respond to complaints of non-payment of salaries of foreign workers. Such measures will encourage employers to give the proper pay to their foreign workers and to pay them on time," Imson said in a statement. (Rambo T. Talabong)

RP protests shackling of seamen in US

By Tilly Lucas

THE GOVERNMENT has protested the "severe treatment" of 13 Filipino seamen who had agreed to testify against their superiors at Rivera who have been charged with violating United States and international environmental laws in California.

The Filipinos, all crewmen of the MV Rainbow, were shackled by American government agents when they were brought to the US district courthouse in Los Angeles from their hotel on Nov. 22 last year, the Department of Foreign Affairs said.

The court had summoned the Filipinos as material witnesses in the cases lodged against ship captain Ioannis Kalfas, chief engineer Edgardo Ocampo and officer Ruben Galvez, the DFA said in a statement.

Shortly after, the Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C. filed a formal note with the US Department of State to bring to its attention the "poor treatment" of the seafarers.

"The Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines ... protests the unnecessarily severe treatment of the 13 Filipino crew members of the MV Rainbow who were restrained with shackles and leg irons," it said in the diplomatic note.

The consul general in Los Angeles also sent a separate communication to the US Attorney General's Office, saying the Filipinos should be released immediately since they "were already cooperating with the US government" in prosecution's favor.

Quoting the assistant US attorney prosecuting the case, the embassy said the Filipinos "were cooperative."

The MV Rainbow docked in the port of Long Beach on Sept. 11, 2004. A few days later, it was detained by the US Coast Guard after inspectors showed the crew had discharged oil-contaminated wastes into the ocean and falsified pollution prevention records.

On Sept. 23, the US Attorney's Office lodged criminal charges against the ship's three officers. US prosecutors charged the officers had ordered the crew to dump the oil waste and sewage overboard, and to lie about it if questioned by the Coast Guard.

PC BUYER'S GUIDE
MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2005
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
A 19
SPORTS

PBA commish gets veiled threats

Ginebra set to protest Taulava's Game 1 stint

By Jane Navarro

EALA

NLEX Eala has received veiled threats as a result of the Asi Taulava case, forcing him to consider quitting his job as commissioner of the Philippine Basketball Association.

Eala said he got a phone call from an unknown caller day taking him to allow the Talk 'N' Text clinician to see action against the Barangay Ginebra Kings in yesterday's Game 1 of the best-of-seven PBA Philippine Cup Finals.

"Somebody just asked me to relax to you this morning: Can you make sure Asi (Taulava) plays tomorrow (yesterday)," Eala spoke of the unknown messenger as saying.

Apart from the mysterious caller, Eala's family also received an unsigned letter urging the commissioner not to prevent Taulava from running up on the Phone Pals.

"I denounce this kind of move and I will not give in to the pressure. I hope (the will stop," said Eala, stressing that he's not going to forget it anyone.

But when the controversy has been seriously affected the safety of his family, Eala said he has been thinking long and hard whether to continue as the top honcho of the first play-for-pay league in Asia.

"It is a concern. I lost a couple of hours of sleep and I'm seriously considering quitting the job," said Eala.

"It is not part of the job description," he added.

With Taulava getting the green light from Talk 'N Text management to play Barangay Ginebra officials are dead-set on filing a protest, which, Eala said, should be formalized right after Game 1 of the Finals.

He added that the second Taulava steps on the hardcourt on a Talk 'N Text uniform, the operate of the championship series would be rendered unofficial.

Under PBA rules, if an ineligible player suits up and is eventually fielded in, the game will automatically be nullified. The commissioner would rather replay the match or forfeit the game altogether.

"We will not do anything to restrain Asi (Taulava) from playing. But as an ineligible player, various violations will be committed by the franchise," said Eala, explaining that sanctions will come in the form of penalties or forfeiture of TV rights.

On the PBA's appeal to reverse the Quezon City Regional Trial Court's order to lift the suspension on Taulava, Eala said a hearing is already set tomorrow which he hopes would finally settle the controversy.

In another development, the initial lineup of the All-Asian team composed of PBA stars will be known within the week when head coach Chot Reyes returns from his South Korea-China sojourn.

The All-Asians who made the aspirants' list will undergo scrimmage stints which Reyes is expected to name the 12 members of the national team.

Meanwhile, Jayson Castroverde and Mo Bolano-sparkling-San Miguel Beer clinched its 14th third-place trophy after downing Shell, 105-100, at Cuneta Astrodome.

Tolentino slates cycling in Tagaytay

TWO EXCITING cycling mass—road and mountainbike—are scheduled during Tagaytay City's Araw ng Lungsod feb. 12 to 14, according to Mayor Abraham "Bambol" Tolentino.

Slated on Feb. 13 are the Tagaytay Mountain Bike Challenge and the Tagaytay Eagle of the Mountain Road Bike Challenge which, according to Tolentino, are expected to lure national riders preparing for the 23rd Southeast Asian Games. The races will be supervised by the Philippine National Cycling Association headed by Pujalte Bivas.

Tagaytay City, through Mayor Tolentino, has expressed keen interest in hosting the road race events of the SEA Games in Montalban, prompting officials of the PNCA cycling, the national federation of the sport, to strongly consider the picturesque city over Subic.

Tagaytay City's mountainous terrain proves an advantage for the national riders and Tolentino said he welcomes hosting the SEA Games road events.

WINNERS!

Top karter eyes tougher challenges for 2005

MATTEO Fermin Goidscilli, the Philippine Sportscar Euro Association (PSAE) Karter of the Year awardee, looks forward to another hectic season as he tackles bigger and tougher challenges this year.

Supported by Omnipages, Stoutch and Added Mobile Prepaid, Goidscilli hopes to make it big internationally as he competes in '04 circuits abroad.

"To be listed by his local sports media as a distinct honor. I know it's harder to stay on top than climbing to the top. But I'll try my best to make it big internationally and shove the world-class talent at Filipinos," said Goidscilli, who made karting history by clinching nine ribbons in a single season.

He's also a strong candidate for the yearly plum, second Golden Wheel Award—the annual giving body for top motorsports achievers—on Feb. 9 at the Manila Polo Club.

After claiming the Castle 65 crown two years ago, Goidscilli captured both the premier Intercontinental A class and the Swiss Max Junior plums last season.

This year, he'll go all out for the Asian Karter of the Year award in the 2005 Asia Zone Open Karting Championship which will kick off April 17-24 in Malaysia. The Philippines will host the second leg tentatively on June 9-12 while the other legs will be staged in Indonesia, Thailand and Macau.

Goidscilli is also set to compete in two prestigious karting championships in Italy—the Trofeo Andrea Margutti Trophy Championship 2005 and the Rotax Max Challenge Championship.

Later this year, he will also test his skills against Asia's karting champions in the CIK-FIA Asia-Pacific Championship Series in Japan in November.

Among others, Goidscilli will also begin karting formula cars and may even race a few events and try to earn a seat in a fully sponsored Team so he plans to join the Formula Renault or the Asia F3000 in 2006.

"It's every racer's dreams to make a big in world formula racing, and with the continued support of the local media and race fans, hopefully I'll make it among the few of the new generation Filipino racers to barge into the international scene," Goidscilli added.

GOIDSCELLI, Karter of the Year

De La Salle tops semis; Letran in

JAMES THURSDAY, First Intimate
Jan 30 – Gerlaxion Letran
14:00 – EDT 14 PEC

By Mulong R. Castillo

LA SALLE clinched top seeding in the Shakey's V-League semifinals, handling the PSC Lady Legends, 25-13, 25-11, 22-25, 25-14, at the close of the eliminations yesterday at the Rizal Coliseum.

The Lady Archers won for the 13th straight time since bowing to Santa Teresa in the inaugural last September.

They will play the fourth-seeded Lady Knights in the best-of-three semifinals starting Thursday while the Legends get the bum deal as they will face the Lady Archers in the second game.

Santa Teresa, the defending champion, actually closed out with a similar 11-1 slate like La Salle, but lost out in the tiebreak for having more wins.

Letran booked the last Final Four seat earlier by outlasting Lyceum, 25-14, 25-22, 22-25, 25-20.

The Lady Knights got back at their first-round nemeseses in what could be the most important game for them to gain the favored teams in the semis and be counted as one of the country's elite collegiate teams.

Cherry Rose Macaraeg-gay came through with a teamhigh-tying-mate 12 points, all but two on kills, while Shanne Diaz accounted Letran's defense with six points coming from blocks. Diaz finished with 12.

Jean Marie Dacoma de la Cuesta and Bangladesh Fatmah-on also contributed for 10 points for the Lady Knights.

Letran wound up with a 8-4 card while Lyceum finished with a 4-8 slate for fifth place.

Jays Infantacion and Pat Fermin finished tied for last place in the event as presented by Combat Omega, 1800 Home of Beauty of Kinds-ever, Amazon and PLDT with Home and Level as official volleyball and outfitter, respectively.

The Lady Knights opened up last in win the Red Defenders.

Behind Michelle Lobaco and Beverly Belen, Letran scrambled the hands to a fourth set but could not hold off elimination Fatches with Dimaranan by scoring as well.

HI! GO
Ateneo cheerleaders Cyan Miguel Bear dogs Ronald Tolentino Shell free recovering the loose ball in their match for third place in the PBA Philippine Cup last night. The Boomer men. SEE SEE.

PBA title tickets up at Ever Mall Tour

TO SPICE up interest in the PBA Timescape Ever Malls, organizers of the tour-active mall tour is putting up a unique raffle prizes where PBA fans could win free tickets in the ongoing PBA championship between Sunday and Feb. 13. Free, PBA jerseys and a rare chance to dare their favorite PBA stars.

Ong Arao, ad and promo manager of Ever Malls, said a minimum purchase of P300 (single or accumulated) from participating stores at Ever malls will entitle a customer to one raffle coupon. Aside from the PBA freebies, Arao said prizes, other prizes are Meralcos-size tickets and round each PBA shirts.

Win a date

Designated teams are located at the supermarket area of Ever Grand Central, main entrance of Ever Gilmore and at the upper ground level of Ever Commonwealth. A separate drop box for Ladies aged 18 to 35 is made available for a chance to win a date with one of the PBA fans.

Promo starts tomorrow (Feb. 1) with deadline for submission of entries on Feb. 15. The draw will be held Feb. 16 at 5 p.m. at the Mall division of Ever Gilmore.

Meanwhile, the PBA Timescape Ever Malls winds up its exhibit at Ever Grand Central today with Ever Commonwealth hosting the next stopover Feb. 1-15. The ten league, in cooperation with Ever Malls, has lined up a series of sports activities at the various Ever-Ecotrans malls to give its legions of fans the chance to interact with their favorite players and teams outside of the playing venue.

Mingle with fans

The Talk 'N Text Phone Pals will grace the event on Feb. 3 while the fans Miguel Bayonnet take their turn on Feb. 5. The Shell Turbo Chargers will mingle with their fans on Feb. 10 while Purefoods will have its team day on Feb. 12.

The mall tour ends Feb. 16-28 at Ever Gilmore with the Coca-Cola Kings receiving their fans on Feb. 19 and the Sta. Lucia Realtors on Feb. 23. Red Bull will have its team membership day on Feb. 26.

Korean Chi keeps WBC feather crown

SOUTH Korea's Chi Ju-jo (left) exchanges blows with Australian Tommy Browne.

SEOUL—South Korea's world feather weight champion, Chi Ju-Jo, routed Australia's Tommy Browne to defend his World Boxing Council title for the second time on Sunday.

Chi, 31, won a 3-0 victory over Browne, 21, after dominating the entire 12-round bout at the Seoul Grand Hilton Hotel.

"I was confident of my victory from the beginning of today's match. I secured a knock-out win over him but the partner was too defensive oriented," Chi told "his bop news agency.

Chi, South Korea's only professional boxing champion, won the WBC title in April. He defended it in July by knocking out Japan's Kinshi Sugiura.

The Korean now expected to be a possible opponent of Filipino champion Manny Pacquiao last year.

Meanwhile in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican Wilfred Negron retained his WBO junior flyweight title in a savage fight with an 11-th round knockout of compatriot Ricci Sanchez.

Negron landed a right cross to knock-out Sanchez with 1:15 remaining in the 11th-1 but not his opponent in the ascent.

Sanchez remained motionless in the floor for more than 15 minutes, and was taken from the ring in a stretcher with a northwest-and-oxygen mask.

The fighter ranked 20th in the so he was losing talents out of the ring, drawing applause from the fans.

Both fighters exchanged heavy blows throughout the first 10 rounds, with the champion dominating the first half of the fight with his jab and height advantage. Sanchez, a former WBO champion, was winning the second half with heavy body blows.

Negron improved to 22-1-2, with 11 KOs, and Sanchez to 31-5-1. AFP, AP

What's Cojuangco's solution to Clark toxic issue?

I What trouble to touch base with Philippine Retirement Committee president Ong "Peping" Cojuangco over the weekend, but I hope he was not disappointed when he said that the problem of toxic waste inside Clark Field can "easily be solved." Had I succeeded to touch base with the PCRC head, I would have asked how solution he would take to end the toxic issue at the former American military base where Cojuangco plans to build an Olympic-standard stadium.

Nothing that modern stadium will be a top priority in my four-year term," said the 79-year-old Cojuangco, who added that he is set to meet soon with officials of the Clark Development Authority and discuss his proposed plan to build a world-class stadium inside the vast former US military base. "There is a vital need to provide our children with a modern, complete and international standard stadium where they can train properly to achieve their dream of winning that elusive Olympic gold."

But at my view, Cojuangco is ill-advised to pursue his plan to build a modern stadium inside Clark Field, somewhere this soldiers has been opposing for a long, long time because of conducted reports about the presence of toxic waste left by the Americans. Environmentalists say the toxic chemicals in the water the people drink and the air they breathe could be harmful to their physical and mental health, including the athletes who will be housed while training there.

Since 1994, the People's Task Force for Bases Cleanup has been asking the US government to remove the toxic wastes left by the American soldiers in Subic Bay and Clark Field. Wes Hernandez, People's Task Force chair and Greenpeace Asia toxic campaign coordinator, said recently that President Macapagal Arroyo should ask US President George W. Bush for a total cleanup of these military bases in order to preserve the bond of friendship between these two allies. Also, Myla Robbenzola of the Alliance of the Bases Cleanup (ABC) and lawyer Eric Mallari, go of Amado Philippines (Philippine Association for Children's Welfare) cited more than 300 people, most of them children, have died due to leukemia, and suffered mental retardation resulting from drinking contaminated water at these former US bases.

Princess Caroline of Hanover, who visits here for a short visit last year as president of Smoke Mountain, had been informed again of the tragic condition of Filipino toxic waste victims. The Princess had earlier bemoaned the failure of the US military to remove the dangerous toxic waste before it left the country in 1991. In a letter, Princess Caroline had asked Mr. Bush "to expedite the necessary environmental measures to restore this natural treasure," but up to now, Filipino toxic waste victims could only wait and weep.

CLEAN LIVING
Manuelo R. Migo

From former President Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada had visited the waste problem with their US counterparts but they accomplished nothing. Americans officials claimed the 1947 Philippines-US military bases agreement did not require environmental remediation, including cleaning up the toxic wastes and providing compensation and medical treatment for affected residents.

Incidentally, I would like to salute President Arroyo for directing PDC chief Peping Cojuangco to transfer the handling of the postponed athletes from the ng. Rizal Memorial Sports Complex to gallocanal and ormoded Manila to the Southern Camp in Baguio City. Clark Field was an original choice to be the international training center, but the plan was shelved. Because the toxic waste issue could be a problem?

At any rate, Cojuangco said Baguio would be an ideal place for a training center because of its high altitude and isolated location.

—

DON'T SIT IT, ILLETO: My heartfelt thanks for fellow Lucena Eagleman, the late Noel Richard Illeto Cornel's basketball and track-and-field champion, who is now based in San Francisco, California.

Now on aging boxer at 37 years old, Espinosa takes on 29-year-old Mexican Ricardo Mayorga on Feb. 19 in Las Vegas.

Methinks, Espinosa need not fight again. But what can he do? He is now forced to continue fighting not only because he needs the money, but also because it is required that he keeps on training to keep his body in shape. Fighting his style in the United States and not against those chinese green card. The last time Espinosa fought a younger opponent, he lost badly to Carlos Baldonis, a record blemish, in a 10-round bout in Reno last year.

Once managed by broadcaster Bernie Rivera, the present hardship which has befallen Lumito Espinosa is truly appalling. If not outright shameful. Now in the round of rush, Espinosa has to risk life and limb every time he climbs atop the ring. What a pity.

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Rosica

Donors neglecting Maldives, UN warns

COLOMBO—One in three people in the low-lying Maldive Islands were hit by the tsunami disaster but international donors are largely overlooking its plight, the United Nations warned Sunday.

Not a cent has been received for shelter in the tiny Indian Ocean archipelago where the tsunamis destroyed infrastructure built over 20 years and hit 70 percent of the economy, the UN said.

The Colombo appeals branch of a joint appeal for $45 million when Secretary General Kofi Annan announced first-hand the destruction, but donors have been slow to dig pay into their pockets.

"We have pledges of about $27 million but not a single cent has been invested for shelter," UN resident representative in the Maldives, Mona Dowad, said AFP in a telephone interview.

He said 15,600 people were still displaced after the waves subsided almost the entire country of 1,192 tiny coral islands, 21 which 199 are inhabited.

At least 30 percent of the islands in the Maldives were made uninhabitable after the seven-foot (two-meter) to the the native, 99 percent of whose territory is sea.

"The coverage of the tsunami impact on the Maldives has faded away from television screens and front pages," Dowad said. "The catastrophic devastation of the Maldives has not touched donor countries or the international community."

Dowad said the deaths in the Maldives—82 killed and 26 missing—were smaller in comparison to other Asian nations but in terms of destruction of livelihoods, the country had taken a big hit.

"The number of people killed is high in proportionate terms to the population," he said. "But, even in absolute terms the number of people affected is high at 300,000—or one-third of the entire population."

He said most of the pledges received so far were for education in the Maldives, with the UN children's fund (Unicef) getting $5.9 million to reopen schools.

The World Health Organization has received $2.5 million for the health sector while Japan contributed $4 million and Germany $2.3 million for disaster relief.

Dowad said a program to get the displaced back to work was largely underfunded and unless people were helped to return to their normal lives the dependency on relief aid would also be greater.

"In some cases all we need to do is get the boats and people can go back to fishing," he said. "If we get the fishermen repaired, then people can start cooking and restaurants can open."

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom told AFP in an interview last week that the Maldives, despite losing South Asia's most prosperous nation, could and will build on its own.

AFP

DELAYED by tsunami—Andrawan couple Sukmadi (left), 36, and his bride Lidya Mathaputi, 25, hold each other during a wedding ceremony in the tsunami-devastated city of Banda Aceh on the Indonesian island of Sumatra on Jan. 30. The marriage was the first wedding celebration in the city since last Dec. 26 when the Indian Ocean tsunami changed their original wedding plans. REUTERS

Experts carefully watching bird flu evolution

HANOI—Bird flu cases in Vietnam have grown since December at around the same rate as last year but scientists are carefully searching for any change in the way the virus is spreading.

A report by Thai and UK researchers published last week suggested that human to human transmission of the virus had likely occurred and experts are on the lookout for the virus mutating—should they soon could lead to a global epidemic.

Official Vietnamese figures—the only available data but considered by scientists as unreliable—show the disease has affected slightly fewer provinces this time compared to previous outbreaks.

By Jan. 30 last year, 39 out of Vietnam's 64 provinces and cities had been declared affected, against 38 so far.

But the number of chickens ravaged by the disease or slaughtered as a precaution remains has fallen steeply, from more than 4.75 million killed in January 2004 to about 900,000 this year.

Health officials seem to have modified their strategy this year. In 2004, they followed some foreign experts' advice to order epicentre slaughtering in an area of 3 kilometers radius around a contaminated farm.

"Everyone realized that that was not really solving the problem," said Pastor Gardner, head of the World Animal Net Alliance Workers (WAP) organization in Vietnam.

Transmission among chickens takes place mostly during transport, mainly by foot or motorcycles, Gardner said, saying it was important to identify risk zones by tracing the trajectory a virus has followed in the three weeks prior to its identification.

"If on a Monday a farm is affected and the previous Saturday the farmer had sold his chickens to his cousin 50 km away, then all the chickens in the cousin's farm too should be slaughtered," he said. "That's much more effective than blindly killing all chickens in a 3 km radius."

The bird flu has however claimed a few more lives this year in Vietnam—11 as of Sunday, as opposed to eight last year.

Rajiv Tandoon, the World Health Organization representative in Vietnam, said: "The outbreak in humans is in far very similar" to that of last year.

But scientists are watching out for one possible mutation, he noted.

"We are worried about a possible mutation of the human cases with the virus remaining in its current form," Tandoon said. "It would put us in a global threat but would be a massive challenge for the health system here."

The other worry, expressed domestically last year as scores of health conferences, is of the virus mutating into a highly contagious one and passing from one human to another, with the potential of killing millions.

Such a mutation would be any indication that the virus changed, even if there is no major rise in the number of cases. That would be much more worrying, Tandoon said.

AFP

Israel to pull out from West Bank towns within days

JERUSALEM—Israel said Sunday it was ready to hand over control of several West Bank towns to the Palestinians within days, further fueling optimism of a genuine breakthrough in the Middle East peace process.

The announcement came ahead of a breakthrough summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas which Israel's public radio said had been lined up for Feb. 8.

"The transfer of control of some towns in the West Bank should take place in the next few days," Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told Israeli radio after meeting with Interior Minister Avraham Poraz and Minister Mohammad Dahlan on the issue.

"We are finalizing the details on the choice of towns and no exact date for their transfer," he added.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei, whose bureau chief was also present at the talks, described the meeting as "very positive" and said that the talks had also focused on the lifting of roadblocks in the West Bank.

The towns involved in the transfer agreement are said to be Ramallah, Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Jericho and possibly Bethlehem in the south.

The transfer of control in Ramallah would be of a major symbolic importance, as it now serves as the political capital of the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's willingness to hand over control in important swathes of the occupied West Bank comes after more than 1,000 Palestinian security forces took up positions across the Gaza Strip with orders to prevent rocket attacks by militant groups.

Mofaz has already secured an unofficial agreement with armed factions such as Hamas for a "testing down" period but warns Israel to reciprocate by ending its intimate operations in the occupied territories and warning to release Palestinian security prisoners.

Israel's official position is that any truce is an internal Palestinian issue but is closely moving toward meeting some of Abbas's demands.

In the last few days, officials have ordered an end to offensive operations in Gaza and a severe curtailment of lethal operations against militants as well as making positive noises about releasing significant numbers of prisoners.

AFP

$4.884 FOR SOMEONE'S HEAD

The bust "Ill Honored Man" by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, shown here, was bought in the Louvre Museum for $4,812,000 at an auction at Sotheby's in New York on Jan. 27. The price was almost 10 times the expected sale price. REUTERS

'Dangerous' global warming possible by 2026, says WWF

OSLO—World temperatures could surge in just two decades to a threshold likely to trigger dangerous disruptions to the earth's climate, the WWF environmental group said on Monday.

It said the Arctic region was warming faster, threatening the livelihoods of indigenous hunters by thinning the polar ice cap and driving species like polar bears towards extinction by the end of the century.

"If nothing is done, the earth will have warmed by 2.0 Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels by some time between 2006 and 2026," the WWF said in a report.

Few scientists have estimated such an early date for a 2.0C rise, seen by the WWF as a threshold that may spur "dangerous" wet rising, causing sea levels and causing more floods, storms or droughts and driving some species to extinction.

World temperatures have already risen by about 0.7C since 1750 with most scientists blaming a build-up of heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide emitted by burning fossil fuels in factories, power plants and cars.

The European Union and many other environmental groups say that governments should cap emissions of greenhouse gases to try to prevent a 2.0C temperature rise. The United States has rejected binding caps under the UN's Kyoto protocol.

At some point, some scientists fear that rising temperatures could create a runaway warming, for instance by melting permafrost in Siberia that could release massive deposits of heat-trapping methane to the atmosphere.

"There is nothing set to avoid a two-degree rise," said Mark New, a climate expert at England's Oxford University who made the 2026-30 projections in the report commissioned by the WWF.

Reuters

2/3 of Iraqis killed in 6 months died in military operations, says report

LONDON—Nearly two-thirds of people killed in Iraq in the past six months died in "military operations," the BBC will say in a report on Sunday which has been contested by the Iraqi interim government.

The British broadcaster in its "Panorama" television show will cite figures it said were from the Iraqi health ministry for casualties from July 1 to Jan. 3, the BBC said in a statement.

Of 3,274 people killed in Iraq during that time, 2,043 were stated to be the result of "military operations," while 1,223 deaths were due results of "terrorist operations," according to figures from the ministry obtained by the BBC.

A total of 8,562 people were also listed as injured in the combined operations.

The BBC initially said that casualties from "military operations" meant deaths resulting from US-led and Iraqi security force actions.

But the health ministry contested the report, and issued a statement on Saturday rejecting the program's conclusions.

"Those recorded as killed in 'military action' included Iraqis killed by terrorists, not only those killed by coalition forces or Iraqi security forces," the statement read.

It also said the casualty figures "included terrorists themselves and Iraqi security forces."

The ministry's protest prompted an apology from the BBC, but the broadcaster said it would still run its "Panorama" program as scheduled.

"The BBC regrets mistakes in its published and broadcast reports," it said in a statement, referring to a press release about the casualty figures released on Friday.

The proposed British cardinal week by The Lancet in October published an article in which made a "conservative" estimate that 100,000 Iraqi civilians had died as a result of the March 2003 US-led invasion, more than half of them from violence. AFP

105-YEAR-OLD Swedish twins Gertrud Gaudinski (left) and Siri Ingmarsson carry flowers and a cake as they hold their long fans' press conference in their home in Stockholm, Jan. 28. The two are the oldest twins in Sweden that count to 86,000 couples. The two manage their daily life without a pre-museum assistance. —

Sweden's oldest twins say turning 100 years 'isn't that big of a deal'

By Marina Karen

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—They have lived for 200 years between them, but Sweden's oldest pair of twins had never seen anything like that before.

Holding up a birthday cake and two bouquets of flowers, Siri Ingmarsson and Gertrud Gaudinski seemed bewildered by the number of photographers huddled around them in the living room of Gaudinski's Stockholm apartment earlier this week.

"Why do they need five photographers?" Gaudinski asked. "Do they not think we'll look on the film?"

The media attention seemed hard to understand for the sisters—after all, big events said, the fact that they turn 100 on Sunday "isn't that big of a deal."

"Not much difference from turning 99," she said.

Still, Ingmarsson and Gaudinski—who both walk without any assistance and do all their daily chores themselves—did their best to answer some of the questions they've almost grown tired of by now. So, they repeated time and again, they do not really have a secret formula for long life.

"We like to joke and say it's because we lived only on rye bread in 1914," Gaudinski said. "That's all we had to eat during the world war. The flour one, that is."

They have never overeaten, it's true, they said, but that hasn't stopped them from keeping their health. Aside from aches they gave little—they each had one stroke—Gaudinski is the only one who has ever been hospitalized. She broke her thigh bone two years ago, but recovered quickly, she said.

Ingmarsson, who is 20 minutes older than her sister, said she has never been seriously injured or ill.

"I have a use for that aches, though," she said.

But in a country where senior citizens have access to free home help service, the sisters do their shopping, cleaning, cooking and laundry themselves. They have both lived in the same apartment building for more than 50 years, Ingmarsson on the second floor and Gaudinski on the third. The building has no elevator, but neither does not has any trouble getting up and down the stairs every day.

Ingmarsson was, she said, the sisters' active lifestyle is probably why they're aged as well.

"They're on the go all the time," he said. "And they get personal exercise from walking up to the stairs."

Siri Ingmarsson, a 63-year-old clockmaker who has lived in Boston, Massachusetts, since 1965, said Sunday's birthday party will be small, with only the closest family. While Gaudinski's daughters is also still alive, other friends and loved ones died long ago.

Stig said he doubted he'll match his sister's feat.

"I already feel like I'm 100," he said.

Sweden, a country of 9 million, has more than 86,000 pairs of twins, but Ingmarsson and Gaudinski are "by far" the oldest, said Nancy Pedersen, a professor who researches twins at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The sisters keeps a national record of all Swedish twins.

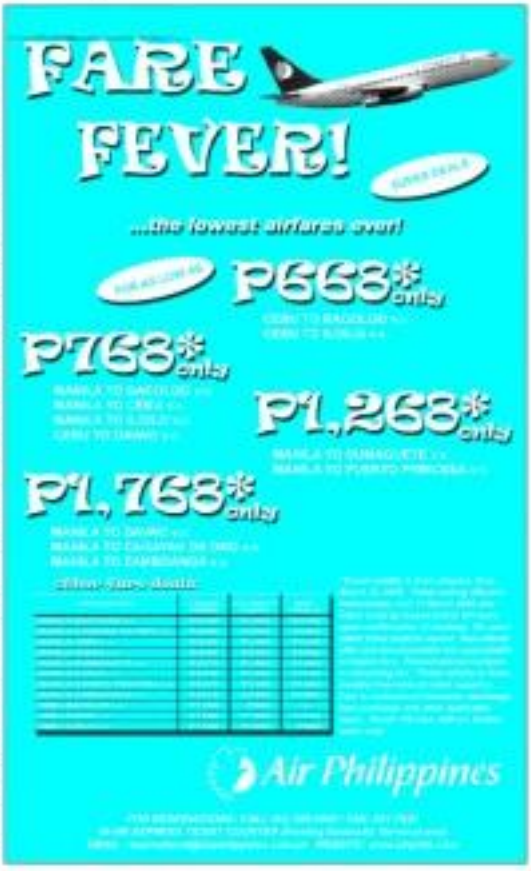
"It's very very unusual that two twins both live to be 100," Pedersen said.

The oldest female twins in the could were Ida Nadia and Gertrude of Japan, both sisters died in 2000 at the age of 107, according to Guinness World Records.

The Swedish sisters said they're not aiming to beat that record. They haven't made any plans for their 101st birthday yet, they said.

"We don't know if we'll still be here then," Gaudinski said. "We may fall down to dust tomorrow." AP

THEY SHOULD LIVE TO BE A HUNDRED
Twins Judith (left) and Edith Schattala, both "Miss Western Germany," pose during a news conference ahead of the "Miss Germany" elections in the southwestern German village of Bad Jan. 29. Judith and Edith will participate in the Jan. 29 event as one competitor. —



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OPINION

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Turning point?

EDITORIAL

RUNOFF ELECTION of what will finally happen in the polling centers of Iraq, US President George W. Bush will declare a victory in the precincts of Washington. That is what troubles us the most about the elections for the Iraqi national assembly, which were held yesterday but whose official results won't be known for a couple of weeks. Regardless of the evidence, Bush will declare that, yes, democracy is truly on the march.

If only it were that simple.

As a people still recovering from the sometimes-unacknowledged effects of martial rule, Filipinos can only look at the Iraqi elections with the deepest sympathy. We wish the vote would be orderly, peaceful and popular. We hope that the vote will lead in quick succession to the formation of a new government with a true mandate, the drafting of a modern, post-Saddam Hussein constitution, and the bloodless conduct of a referendum to ratify it. We pray that the vote would prove to be a true turning point in the Iraqi journey to democracy.

But the reality is much more complicated, and violent, than what we would like to believe.

The political crisis in Iraq is, in truth, a civil war. Under the best of circumstances, a first election (as in East Timor or Cambodia) is a difficult achievement. But hastily conducted in a country that is spinning out of anyone's control, an election does not only put the lives of candidates and voters at stake; it actually undermines the very ideal of democracy.

On the Economist notes, the names of most of the 7,000 candidates for the 275 seats at stake in Iraq were kept secret "until the last minute, for fear of making them an assassination target." Why? Insurgents had declared a "holy war" on the entire electoral process.)

It is possible to hold credible elections even in the middle of a civil war; robust democracies have given proof of that. The United States famously reelected Abraham Lincoln while the American Civil War raged. But a fledgling democracy?

The decision to push through with the elections regardless of the deteriorating in the security situation, however, was not made by the government of interim prime minister Iyad Allawi. It was the call of a White House desperate for a face-saving way out.

Bush announced only last week that US forces will stay in Iraq as long as the new government needs them, but already we can sense a shift in his administration's priorities. True, he has asked the US Congress for an additional $80 billion for the upkeep of US forces in Iraq (increased to 150,000 troops in the run-up to the elections). But the supplementary budget is short-term. The Bush administration now has a new focus for the medium-term: pull out.

We have seen this pendulum, for-and-for-get approach to democracy-building before, under the same Bush administration. The year after invading Afghanistan in 2001 and toppling the Taliban regime, the administration failed to include a single dollar for Afghan rehabilitation in its proposed budget. By then, of course, the cowboys in the White House were rounding up a posse against Iraq.

Extrication from the Iraqi quagmire has proven more difficult, but the elections and the prospect of a new government will give the White House the perfect excuse.

Are we contradicting ourselves? We had joined the international chorus of condemnation against the unilateral American military action in Iraq. Shouldn't we support both the election, as a milestone in democracy, and the eventual pullout of US troops, as an index of self-determination?

We support a democratic, unoccupied Iraq. If the Americans had made sure that the legislative elections would take place in security and enjoy the support of a majority, we would have sung Washington's praises. But the US occupation of Iraq had a fatal flaw: The United States was not prepared to administer the country. The results include a country wracked by violence, with no real center of control, and an election struggling for legitimacy.

By rushing the vote, the White House will be able to claim a short-term victory. But the danger of a rushed election may very well be long-term: the erosion of the Iraqi people's confidence in democracy.

More betrayals in GMA administration

ILOCOS SUR: Gov. Chavit Singson was hopping mad last Saturday after he read a story in our newspaper that President Macapagal-Arroyo had reached a deal with former President Estrada to stop the latter from smacking her administration. The deal was allegedly for GMA to drop charges in exchange for Erap to go big shot in his attacks on DBM and her policies. The latter said it was Presidential Chief of Staff Norberto Gonzales who struck the arrangement during a one-hour talk with Erap at the latter's rest house in Tanay, Rizal.

True or false? Singson supports it is true because a day after Gonzales' visit, GMA issued a statement that she plans a comeback in the Pico Pena Management Corp. (PPMC), the agency implementing projects in the La Union port. Singson's former employees—Carmelita Imbong and Nestor Lim—are members of the PPMC board. The two had testified against Erap, sr. a Senate of Singson. Florentia Bonoc, heads the PPMC.

As the time DBM made the statement, Erap announced the formation of a citizen's committee that, he said, would help solve the country's economic problems.

The next day, Malacañang said, "The President welcomed the opposition's move not to destabilize her administration and its offer to help."

If you were Singson, what would you think? He wouldn't be was very angry. This is ingratitude and a betrayal of the worst kind, he said. It is all right to woo your enemies, he added, but not at the expense of your allies.

Circumstantial evidence really points that way, but let's wait for what Malacañang has to say and for further developments.

I hope it is not true, for if it is, it just proves GMA is one of her characters she cannot be trusted. It is just the latest chapter in a career full of betrayals and false promises.

* * *

The increase in the Value Added Tax is one more such betrayal of the people. The increase will hit the poor where it hurts most: in their pockets and their stomachs.

Malacañang's statement that basic commodities will be exempted from the increase is a lie. There is no provision in the bill passed by the Senate exempting basic goods from the VAT. A congressman said the exemption would be passed later on issues of the Senate-House Bicameral conference committee.

But what happened if the exemption is not passed? No-law-saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. This is not the first time that a bill with good intentions is lost in the wheeling and dealing in Congress. It would be just one more betrayal, nothing more in the Arroyo administration.

The increase in many government fees, the increase in power and water rates, the continuing rise in the prices of fuel and medicines are more betrayals. Maybe the administration cannot help the rise in power and fuel prices, but it certainly could have stopped the increase in government fees out of consideration for the people already being squeezed dry. The fact that many government agencies rushed to increase fees before the law took effect smacks of the President. To paraphrase Hamlet: Something stinks is wrong.

* * *

What's happening to our policemen? After a policeman cuts arrests and killed six persons in Malate, another policeman shot to the head, is said Sunni, a helpless and defenseless dog. In the premises of the Senate, yet. The latest policeman is no ordinary cop. He is a member of the elite Special Action Force (SAF), whose members are carefully selected and specially trained. That is why they were the ones chosen to secure the Senate.

So what happened to this particular cop that he could bloodily shoot the dog "Bantoy" in the head? His excuse was that he and his mates were to keep dogs away from the Senate premises (if it was the Senate, it would not is to become investigation how dogs). But surely, the amateur didn't order them to shoot dogs, did they?

Many people were angered by the cold-blooded shooting of Bantoy, a pet of the employees of the Senate motor pool. Fortunately, the dog did not die, though the .22-caliber bullet it took lodged in its head. It may still die, it is now frail and unsteady.

The Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) (that is why) has offered to nurse Bantoy back to health and adopt it. But even if the dog survives, the history is not so bright for it. In the future, it may have epileptic fits, or worse than that, its animal instincts it suffers to be tame and remains normal.

The strange thing is why are the top police officials and the officers of the Philippine Amateur Radio Association (PARA) quiet. How even a dog can be worse of the sterling cop. It is said that the Senate SAF members had earlier shot another dog and ate its meat in payback for a drinking spree. Obviously they liked the same dog meat that the Senate tried to make out of Bantoy motor pool servants.

A law, the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), penalizes the killing, butchering, selling and eating of dog meat. The duty of policemen is to enforce the law and arrest those who violate it. The duty of the Senate and PNP leadership parallels the enforcing it to show the rest of the people. Action time—is, the words of Sen. Alfredo Lim... "the law applies to all, or not at all."

Today, a dog was shot in cold blood by cops; tomorrow, it could be a person.

What's education for?

THERE'S THE RUB

Gemma de Quiroz

CLL Missionary Bonnie Council executive director, had an interesting thing to say last week. The Philippines, he said, could be suffering from a "brain drain" in reverse, not from it.

"There could be an oversupply income areas in a country like the Philippines, where manpower is scarce. At least we have lower universities with quality rather than allowing hundreds of unemployed college graduates to roam the streets," Mananzan based his remarks on a one-year study made by the British Council with funding from the Asian Development Bank.

Well, if the point of education is merely to enable students to find jobs, then I agree with the schools only a college or university education in this country is superfluous, even counterproductive. It is four or five years' worth of time and effort. A couple of months from now thousands of college graduates will line up before their school's diploma to get their diplomas, and we will hear again, in editorials and various commentaries, about how to free of those hopeful faces will turn sullen in the next few years. Most of them will end up glorified entry-level employees. There are simply not enough managerial jobs to go around.

If the point is finding a job abroad, then the best of the years spent in colleges and universities are just as well a waste of time and effort. You won't be working as a doctor, lawyer, or media person in other countries anyway. They won't take you in those capacities simply because you have a degree in medicine, law, or communication from a Philippine university. Your qualifications will not matter to them, to go by the homework reading of colleges and universities some years ago, where doctors, DP and La Salle landed among the lower ranges of the ladder, a far cry from 10 years before when they were among the top 20 in Asia. You have colleges in medicine, law and communication from a Philippine university, your work will work as a caregiver, a bank teller, or a fast-food attendant anyway.

If the point of education is to merely get

some kind of employment, here or abroad, we would be better off scrapping colleges and universities and putting up training and work schools and schools that teach survival English and other necessary. Many colleges and universities are already doing it, opening up nursing departments in response to the demand for caregivers in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. And teaching functional English to the nurses and maids can communicate with their employers. I say not teaching correct English since when I say maybe we should aim just up pop music schools. That's our main export to Asia... musicians and bands.

But if the point of education is more than just employing people, then the problem becomes a lot more complicated. We need to look beyond simply by lowering the number of colleges or universities. The problem precisely lies in the fact that our whole educational system is now predicated on rendering students on find work. That is a narrow and unenlightened a view of education as you can get. The point of education is not just to impart skills, it is to impart vision. The point of education is not just to prepare the student to face the "outside world." The point of education is to educate.

I point getting students the skills to find jobs is important as well, particularly for a country like ours. I found nothing short of horrific the field of high unemployment rates right now for all not through dentistry and bar examinations through nursing school. At the end of the day, we would just fattened up from undernourish the car be had lived. Being, grimy and sweaty, to

The lesser evil

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cavanaugh

THE LEFTISTS in the House of Representatives, specifically party-list members like Liza Maza, are now complaining that the House was not able to hear the data of the poor in the old income bans, the banks and the other sectoral congressmen. Maza also supposed to represent the marginalized sectors, not members of the House's ways and means committee. Where were they during the deliberations on the old income? What were they doing?

* * *

Because it's evident that the leftist members of the House are intent on pursuing their agenda, do against any legislation that will advance the government's budget, the chairman of the ways and means committee, Rep. Exequiel Javier, of Antique province, is entitled to many observers that they merely want to hamper anarchy and sow the government fail.

Javier also advised the members of the opposition in Congress? Can't they see beyond their agenda of just opposing the administration for the sake of opposing so that they can bring down the administration? Javier also got frustrated back to answer the query is true that champion former President Joseph Estrada, whose heart is supposed to be bleeding for the poor, shocked Hong Kong with his extravagant lifestyle, is the one who is behind the opposition's tactics?

What about the members of the majority, such as Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan and finance committee chair Manuel Villar? Why are they opposing the budget? Is it because Villar's presidential bets empty discussion in the recent Lakas meeting? Is it complete nonsense. Villar knows how crucial a role the executive department in its currency. What about Pangilinan? Is it because he has been hyperpersonal to the IMF since 1997, but can't he see that times were worse in?

* * *

Not all have not seen issues against the administration, but in this issue of the old income, the chairs — to quote economist professor Solita Monsod — is pretty much. It's necessary imposing a new or revenue package that would provide the needed government funds to finance the social expenditure efforts over the poorer sectors in terms of higher prices, or bringing the economy to the brink of collapse. It's clearly a choice between the lesser of two evils, and the latter is never as dire could definitely affect the delivery of basic services to the poor. As always we quarrel about who's causing the mess, only when the most important thing is to save money is to save the patient's life.

* * *

In my mind, the government considers almost no more how to avoid a VAT increase, but to minimize its effects on the poor through salary increases. In this connection, she moves approval by the House of the new central bill has to be viewed as one more salary cut. This bill seeks to lower the salary rates increases for qualifying ranks ranging below P7,000 a month; thus it assures the middle and lower classes a meager salary reduction to consider breakfast.

Speaking of the middle class, it should be the first to push for the old increase as economic collapse... if revenue goals are not met... would hit its lives and livelihood, not the rich.

* * *

The prospect of a narrowing fiscal crisis affecting the delivery of basic services to southern lawmakers financial ban is reluctance. Last night Cecile Ahearn and I had as guest (because regular Sunday dollar) presence afternoon program Television Secretary Rosemarie Head, who spoke about the "crisis in 10" education." The details he gave should shake our legislators in their Rally shoes as they'd never experienced a real fiscal crisis. Head stone, honorable legislators, and tell us if a 13.5 cents increase in the selling price of a can of sardines matters a lot.

In a recent survey of 41 countries on high school competencies, 10 placed 41st, beating us by Saudi Africa, Ghana, Botswana and Saudi Arabia. On the elementary level, out of 11 countries, 10 placed 33rd, beating only Bosnia and Montenegro. In the 2003 survey of 38 countries on high school students in 38 countries on "Trends in International Mathematics and Science," conducted by Boston College and released last December 2004, 10 placed 36th. Guess who were the top five? Our neighbors Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan (which can avail the United kingdom).

What are our legislators going to do about 10 losing the biggest drain engine? Surely they know that schools need plenty of funding.

* * *

The readers of the Manila High School Federation were quite published during former Education Secretary Edilberto de Jesus' time: only 6.64 percent of the public elementary students scored 75 percent or higher, meaning that only 40,000 students out of 1.1 million passed. Head revealed that despite free and compulsory elementary education here, only 67 out of every 100 children qualified for the elementary, and only one-half of the 67 graduates, only 67 percent are able to graduate from elementary, while only one-half of the 67 graduates graduate from high school. On the other hand, in the "world class" University of the Philippines, only 10 percent of our teachers scored 75 percent or higher, which means that on many than 10,000 out of around 51,000 teachers passed the test. In other words, 41,000 UP graduates and high school students are packed into above 41.2% public elementary and high schools, but the English is still down by 57.49% disastrously.

* * *

Think does only speak of physical infrastructure, unless the quality of UP education, which is another world-class, dead mixed time one reason the our poor performance in comparison to 10% were struggling to finance the education of their children (tuition is nearly 10 spends on by $1.5K or P7,500 per student per year, whereas Thailand, for instance, spends about $80.3 per student ($4,179), and Japan $6,000 to 10). United States and New Zealand's allocation of about $1,500-P125,000 per student curriculum.

(To be continued)

Life and death

KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO

Carlos Isagani T. Zarate

IT may just be a bad talents in the political career of Vice President Noli De Castro, but one definitely this month of his "adopted" namesake, Philippine eagle "Kabayan," illustrates the limits we give reality when modernization and conservation clash.

Eagle Kabayan, the first eagle (in him) bred in captivity into death last Jan. 8 after being electrocuted on an electric post inside the forest reserve of the Mt. Apo National Park. The circumstances surrounding Kabayan's death fueled reports of the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF), which runs a breeding center located in the watershed area of Malagai in Davao City.

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PEF leaders showed that wild Philippine eagles would be released into the wild — from "hotel" to a natural habitat of high-voltage transmission towers and power lines — without meeting an accident. While the two-year-old Kabayan was "supervised," the PEF said it was unavailable the night to attend to an electrical pole. Kabayan was among the eagles raised in an isolated forest reserve. The release of Kabayan on Earth Day April 22, 2004 was aimed to test the survival capacity of captive-bred eagles in the wilderness. The experiment showed what is already a disturbance but only in the effort to return the feared extinction of the country's national bird has also in the awards conservationist conservation program. Ironically, Kabayan was released inside the forest reserve of Philippine National Oil Co., which has a geothermal plant in the area.

"This is a millbrook time but we remain committed to saving Philippine eagles from being in the wild for generations to come. We shall keep investigating the circumstances surrounding Kabayan's death to the best of our ability, this isolated event notwithstanding. We continue to believe in the value of preserving our natural treasures not just for preservation's sake, but for the sake of all who live in the forests for our needs," the PEF said in a statement.

Kabayan's death nearly overshadowed the "birthday" anniversary of eagle Pag-asa, the first eagle to be born in captivity through artificial insemination and hatched on Jan. 15, 1992. Just like Kabayan's celebrated release to the wilderness, Pag-asa's birth was considered both as a milestone and a cost of how we have we are in winning our country's wrenching and has dramatic transformations.

Thirteen years after Pag-asa's birth, all we can see is the continuing destruction of the eagle's natural habitat.

* * *

Nowadays, many Davaoeños envy Cebu. It is not only because President Macapagal-Arroyo loves to visit the place. It is also because of the special attention she has devoted to Cebu. For the past two years, Mindanao has been plagued by vigilante-type killings of crime suspects in the metropolis, she immediately ordered authorities to investigate and prosecute those involved. Some members followed suit, condemning the killings as a sign of the breakdown of law and order.

But Davaoeños have yet to hear the President or senators expressing as much concern about the spate of summary executions in Davao City and other parts of Mindanao. Between 1998 and 2001 and 2003 and has since claimed more than 200 lives. President Arroyo cannot feign ignorance about these killings. Two years ago, a gang of concerned citizens and human rights advocates even requested to see then Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, to send Arroyo an the President a petition for the investigation of the killings in the Davao region.

To be fair, even Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte City alone, 38 people—including women and minors—have been murdered by motorcycle-riding gunmen. The media have nicknamed all the "riot" to the so-called Davao Death Squad (DDS). But, claiming police authorities to the hapless victims that there is no such vigilante group like the DDS that exists! "It's a riot" war among drug syndicates," they say, apparently reinforcing the mindset of executions in force for many killings in Davao. If there is no DDS, it follows that it means that the murderers in Davao City, despite all the support Mayor Rodrigo Duterte has been getting the police. Not only that, it appears that these syndicates can operate with impunity, even with the police force in their payroll to help out the local police for security.

Still, whether the hits are made by vigilantes or by guns for hire, the police station have to. Accordingly, Mindanao is a safer haven for drug lords of their until now no single summary execution case has been solved. An alarmed senior lawyer in Davao commented that the only way for the killings to stop is to declare "old fashioned police work." Some people have to be caught. If the survey on blaming the mayor while the police fail to clean out is to do their jobs, he said. The police failure is probably what also exasperated Senator Biazucin, the deputy ombudsman for Mindanao, who is asking the ombudsman to take over the summary killings. Last week, Ombudsman Literally requested National Bureau of Investigation director Reynaldo Wycoco to send to Davao a crack NBI team that will investigate the killings and, presumably, arrest the culprits. "We are not running into a killing field," said Biazucin, himself a former NBI agent. He is doubtless right. And, probably it is high time, too, for the Arroyo to also step in. That is, if she's so concerned with Davao and the other places to also in with Cebu.

Comments: to karlos_z23@hotmail.com or karlos_zarate@yahoo.com

Paredes' principles

THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

CHANCES are you know who Jim Paredes of the Apo Hiking Society fame is. Yes, probably also know Heidi Mendoza friends, columnist for the Philippine newspaper Today, spokesperson for the Times, and Daisy Paredes, columnist for the Malaya. All of them are well-known (and deservedly so) for their patriotism, professionalism and integrity. However, only a dwindling number of Filipinos know that Jim Paredes' maternal grandfather, Quintin Paredes (1884-1977), the was a lawyer and a nationalist out of him, a politician of principles—whether as member of the Cabinet, interim Philippine Governor-General, Senator or Speaker of the House, he left an well-known (and deservedly so) for their patriotism, professionalism and integrity. However, only a dwindling number of Filipinos know that Jim Paredes' maternal grandfather, Quintin Paredes (1884-1977), the was a lawyer and a nationalist out of him, a politician of principles—whether as member of the Cabinet, interim Philippine Governor-General, Senator or Speaker of the House, he left an

Quintin Paredes came to mind because of a book I received from Ambeth Ocampo entitled "Bayan ko: Manila." by Frank Scott. The book points out an inspiring example of Filipinos speaking out against Jewish persecution.

On Nov. 9, 1938, the Nazis unleashed what came to be known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, in response to the assassination of the third secretary of the German embassy in Paris by a Jewish student. As the British Wochenblatt Chronicle describes the events, "Reinhard Heydrich [the head of the Nazi Security Police] has issued orders that the German police and SS reprehensible are a secret telegram at 1:20 a.m., November 10, 1938 to all headquarters and stations of the State Police; all district and sub-districts of the SS; the party functionaries for the immediate and simultaneous organization of demonstrations against Jews throughout Germany and Austria. The decree stipulates are not to be prevented by the police; but arrested, rather, the police are only to supervise the observance of the guidelines."

"The result of this policy was the first violent pogrom (riot) on Western European soil in hundreds of years. 36 Jews were killed, 3000 synagogues were destroyed, 7500 Jewish shops, businesses and homes were vandalized and ransacked.

"Immediately after Kristallnacht, a fine of one billion marks was levied, not upon the criminals, but upon the victims, the Jewish community of Germany. Along with the fine came a decision, taken by a conference of Nazi leaders on December 12, 1938, to 'Aryanize the German economy' to get the Jews out.... Nazi policy had now moved into the overt destruction of all Jewish life in the Third Reich."

Very literally, people reacted with horror and outrage to Kristallnacht, causing Hitler to order the suppression of such obvious acts of opposition against the Jews. Among the people inspired to protest against the Nazi actions was Quintin Paredes, then an assemblyman and majority floor leader, who led a public protest against the Nazi pronouncements. Together with other anti-Nazis and with the support of a rather large crowd, he delivered speeches to the extent that the German consulate in Manila was quite concerned.

A decade before, in the 1920s, Filipino businessmen and politicians rallied around Tan Malaka, an Indonesian communist whom the Dutch colonial authorities wanted the American colonial authorities to expel from the Philippines. And decades later, of course, Filipinos from all walks of life rallied and protested in defense of Vietnamese refugees, as well as Burmese and Malaysian dissidents. We have a long and richer touching history of rallying in defense of oppressed peoples.

Filipinos like Quintin Paredes would have put Arabs into their denunciations of Nazi persecution by welcoming Jewish refugees to the Philippines at a time when other nations had slammed their doors shut. Indeed, when a delegation from North America, visited, it became Philippine government policy—after the sinking efforts of Jose Avelino Escudero, the President, who had commissioned Jewish businessmen and sympathetic Americans still not able to escape Nazi Europe—to allow the Jewish refugees to occupy Jewish refugees—to allow the Jewish refugees to occupy Jewish refugees—to allow the Jewish refugees to occupy Jewish refugees

VAT spares the poor

MSC Ralph Recto should be commended. The chief of the Senate's ways and means committee broke new ground in equating the poor from being hit by a slew of tax measures that the administration is currently pushing.

He seems to have tirelessly searched for ways to address the gaping fiscal deficit and is loudly darning the whole phrase of confronting the problem... from denial to acceptance. At one point, he urged that there is no need to legislate new taxes; we will outgrow the problem. Now that is possible we might never find out in our lifetime.

Now, he seems to acknowledge there is indeed need for new taxes, but he specifically opposes the legislation of the new tax that matches the most in the tax reform package of the government.

A five-percentage point (20 percent) increase in VAT, which is estimated to take in an additional P76 billion for the national coffers and ease the pressure of the fiscal problem, is for Recto unacceptable. And then he seems to have found changed his mind—maybe there's a need to increase the VAT. But it should be concentrated with President Macapagal-Arroyo's wish and time, by all means, spare those allies because troubles are now the maple bread of the poor.

Like a man who is just doing his job, Recto must undergo the process of mulling over the problem. The good news is, this process need not drag for long. These have been, after all, a lot of mulling over on the issue that have been done by tax experts, both local and international, and by countries that have adopted a far higher VAT rate than us.

DBC which is by nature a consumption tax, will logically spare the poor. Aside from the fact that the VAT increase will encompass untaxed food such as rice and vegetables; the tax is so designed such that, the more you consume, the more you are hit by the tax. The rich, unfortunately for them, spends more on VAT-like products rather than on VAT-exempt food products.

Coupled with the plugging of leakages in the system, such as exemptions on imports, the VAT becomes superior to all other taxes in inherent simplicity to ensure the discretion of the taxmen and therefore decreases cost options.

In an ideal world, a higher tax is bad and must be avoided by all means. But we live in a world where most live below poverty. On top of that, we live in a country desperately trapping in local shoes wants. It is therefore no longer a question of whether or not this government ought to raise more taxes. It is a question of what revenue generation measure minimizes the negative repercussions on the poor and the economy. The VAT, studies show, is the better tax.

There's been too much mulling over. The government ought to act on this fiscal problem decisively and swiftly. This is not possible without the help of Congress.

—FERDINAND PHILIP CUNANAN
FREEDOM INC.,
733 Raginos St.,
Sarangay Central, QC

LETTERS

Time to go after bus companies

MIAA Chief is right. ("Removal of 'wet leg' enforcer traffic rules," PDI, 1/27/05) If bus and jeepney drivers in Makati can be disciplined into observing loading and unloading zones, why can't the same be done on EDSA?

How about going after the owners of the bus companies? Instead of arresting or issuing tickets to drivers who do not observe loading and unloading zones, why not take pictures of the buses? After a certain number of violations have been committed by the drivers of a bus company (say just one particular driver or bus), all the buses of that company should be banned from EDSA or its franchise should be revoked. This way, the burden of disciplining drivers would be primarily their employers. I'm sure the transportation Manila Development Authority's.

But let's not see Chair Bayani Fernando and the MMDA, the traffic situation in the metropolis has seen much improvement. It used to be that Commonwealth Avenue was a nightmare to motorists late at night. But now, a 15-minute drive from Batasan San to Quezon Circle is not just a possibility it has very likely—sounds ludicrous.

—FERDIE TOLEDO,
ma.rosanne@gmail.com

Useless step

THE is in reaction to the news item "Top economy exec 'dismay' dismissed." (PDI, 1/25/05) Dismissal is one step, but it is a useless step. It won't deter or stop corruption.

If the government is really serious in its anti-corruption drive, it must put all the corrupt people in jail for the rest of their lives and confiscate all their properties. Now many times did we hear corrupt people getting dismissed? But did anyone of them suffer financial hardship afterwards? None. In fact, they still enjoy the fruits of their labor (theft).

Can these people also acquire properties in other countries and were able to move freely with a substantial amount in bank deposits.

—JESSE STANLEY,
stanel@yahoo.com

Truth behind missing GSIS contributions

THIS has reference to the news item "Where did ERB premiums go? Senate eye probe" written by Cynthia D. Balana (PDI, 1/24/05), which was to just inaccurate and misleading.

May we clarify that the alleged missing P1 billion is no government obligation to the Government Service Insurance System, incurred by the Department of Education (formerly Bureau of Muslim Mindanao) from 1997 to 2003. The Affairs, the Department of Budget and Management, and the GSIS have entered into a memorandum of agreement to address the problem of unremitted GSIS premiums.

I am compelled to write this clarification not the time to used as a negative propaganda and political tool to destroy the credibility of the institution. ARMM officials, especially with the MOMO decision scheduled August 2005.

We welcome the move of Rep. Mario Aguja to conduct a Senate probe on this issue as everybody concerned will know the truth.

—TOMMY A. TEE,
Regional Subdirector,
Rosary Heights, Cotabato City

THE STORY was based on a press conference issued by the Malacañang party-list congressmen.

Upon receipt of the Tee's letter, I immediately called up Representative Aguja for clarifications. He is still abroad. But Lito tells us his media relations officer, Joey Nebrasola, who said that not the Malacañan nor Aguja was throwing the story.

—CYNTHIA D. BALANA,
PDI reporter

Appalling hypocrisy

THE SO-CALLED "private prosecutors" in the Estrada plunder trial call for hearings during a week. (PDI, 1/26/05) Even as voters in town, and the need to see dense with witnesses and exhibits, and to review voluminous documents, I would personally prefer to be out of the case, given other commitments. One defense team has never asked for the postponement of the general that we were not ready. There a week? I am one. That has been my stand since 2001. Due process demand for everyone, no matter who is president. Today was of those "private prosecutors," seemingly chorus, spiral a few minutes to the trial. The others are not seen at all, seemingly busy in collecting Church Gingers.

These lawyers were with Singson last month when he said about the Arroyo administration: "We have with all the graft and corruption but everything has an end. I think this is too much." Why did they not ask him to elaborate on such graft and corruption? After a meeting with President Macapagal-Arroyo, Singson now even names President Arroyo and? Where is the civil society, the lawyers and "the Singson, arguably working homeless's resource, Phildev/Watch is really still Barcadia/Watch.

These lawyers focus on People's turning guns. They do not demand a special tribunal for the billionaire, Hermenio Disini, Carlos Lacson et al., or ask that Sen. Perez et al. be probed.

Erap lost his mandate with no democratic debate preceding a mutilated voting in the Senate. The "several envelope" killed him in the Senate. We, the prosecution did not prosecute this document-wise plunder case as it did not incriminate him or all. He has been deposed since 2001. The Singson soldiers' idea of modern patriotism is to oppose one-term and democratic slavery. We, they may have welcomed laborers' decision allowing Senators Benigno Aquino and Joseph Estrada to be treated abroad despite their pending cases. They continue to try and convict the Senators in plenary. Two of them, the people put in the Senate.

Journey! It may be more widespread today. On Dec. 29, 2004, a domestic I know won P40,000 on a bet of P10 in one of the casinos in our neighborhood. The hypocrite appeals in line to administered with all not eye-and an unequal hand.

—R.A.V. VARUHAS,
4041 Sipnan St., Poblacion, Makati City

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Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Burgonio

6 cops hurt in clash with gang

SAN ISIDRO, Batangas—Six policemen were wounded, two of them in critical condition, in a five-hour gun battle between suspected members of "the small Mafia of Batangas" and lawmen in Barangay Poblacion here at about 6 a.m. yesterday.

The operation also led to the arrest of eight gang members, including two women and their alleged leader, who had a bounty of P500,000 for his capture.

Senior Supt. Francisco Dos Montenegro, Batangas police director, identified those wounded as Chief Insp. Jonathan Calizo, SPO4 Julius Epoderis, PO3 Manuel Rubio, PO2 Leo Sapalalo, PO1 Ronald Torres and PO1 Arturo Ostador.

All are members of the elite Special Action Force (SAF), except for Ponlot who is from the Batangas Provincial Police Office.

They were rushed to the Batangas Provincial Hospital in Batangas City.

Sapalalo and Escalante were in critical condition. At 3 p.m., they were airlifted to a hospital in Manila.

The firefight, according to residents here, forced the Shell Talisay, a nightclub that was ordered closed by the municipal government in 2000, into a war zone.

The owner is reportedly owned by Jun Dimaculta, a nephew of Batangas Gov. Ed. Dimaculta.

Philippine National Police chief Edgar Aglipay immediately flew in the Batangas Police Provincial Office in Batangay Rizmonteng Beya, Batangas City, to congratulate the members of the arresting team.

Brave men

During a news conference held at the Camp Miguel Malvar here, Aglipay praised the bravery of Calizo and his men, as he noted that he would recommend their immediate promotion to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Aglipay also announced that the four-have Tagalog Region will be awarded as the best regional police office in the PNP's anniversary celebration today.

Director Oscar Calderon, Calabarzon police director, said Calizo led 40 members of the SAF and the Calabarzon Traffic Management Group (TMG) who raided the supposed hideout of suspected kidnap-for-ransom gang leader Edgar Allan Abrazo in a Chinese-style establishment in Barangay Poblacion at around 6 a.m.

He said the police received a report that the group was again planning to kidnap a prominent businessman in Batangas City.

Montenegro said the police men were met with gunfire as they were approaching Abrazo's hideout. He said Abrazo, who has an P800,000 reward for his capture, was the subject of a warrant of arrest for the kidnapping of a Filipino-Chinese businessman in Manila a few months back and a string of carnapping and hijacking cases.

Abrazo, Montenegro added, was one of the leaders of the Junio Mong Abrazo syndicate that was said to be behind the series of kidnappings of prominent Filipino-Chinese entrepreneurs in Manila and Southern Tagalog.

Gunfight

Minutes after the gunfight started, the suspects lobbed a hand grenade at the policemen.

"Calizo and the five others were seriously hurt by the shrapnel from the grenade. The suspects were really ready to shoot it out with our raiding team," Montenegro told the reporters.

Calderon said the suspects caught the help of a reporter who facilitated the group's surrender.

"Maybe Abrazo realized that they would be killed if they continued fighting because they were outpowered," Calderon said.

Along with Abrazo, suspects Marlon Jusay, 47, of Sto. Rita, San Jacinto, Los Baños, Laguna; Melvin Quijano, 34, of Barangay Bolbok, Batangas City; Bedel Caballero, 26, of Kumintang Ibaba, Batangas City; Casimiro Medrano, 32, of San Manuel, Batangas; Delmer Caballero, 36, Sitio Ilihanin, 24, of Marikina City, and Bonet Jalen, 20, of Bulan, Laguna, yielded to police after hours of negotiations.

'Small Mafia'

Calderon said Abrazo and his men "had been protecting business activities in Batangas and nearby provinces for years now."

He said that the group was also known to hijack delivery trucks of beer manufacturers in Calabarzon.

It was also behind an oil pilferage syndicate whose members had victimized delivery trucks of Petron and Shell in Batangas, he said.

"The group is like a small Mafia here in Batangas. They are tough-as and ruthless," Calderon described the group.

He said the asserted, high-powered firearms recovered after the shootout were proof that the group was "no ordinary criminals."

Among those confiscated were a Browning automatic rifle, a light automatic weapon, an M14 automatic rifle, an M16 baby Armalite rifle, dozens of magazines for rifles, dozens of ammunition for grenade launchers, one set of camouflage blue uniform, one Nissan Sentra with plate number UBS-514, one mini-suburb Delsa with plate number BAA-209, and one Yamaha Enduro motorcycle with plate number PH-7868.

A black wig, possibly for a woman, was also among the materials seized.

Abrazo denied all the accusations against him and said he didn't do anything. But the two women were more vocal. Shaimale, who said she was the common-law wife of Bevis threatened how the police abused her.

"The police kicked me in the face when I declared that they even pulled a knife at me," Shaimale said. "I don't really know what Marlon is into, but he repeatedly says that his clients order him to repair."

Soho, who claimed to be Abrazo's fiancée, pointed out Abrazo and his gang were only the caretakers of Tabacos. Reports Ramos and Mel Abuyuer-Labio, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

12 bandits die in clash in Lanao

LUMBAYANGA CITY—Twelve suspected bandits were killed while three Marine soldiers were wounded in a clash in Barangay Maubay, Tubaran, Lanao del Sur on Saturday.

Members of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 8 (MBLT8) and the Lanao del Sur Police were patrolling the area when they were fired upon by about 50 armed men, according to Brig. Gen. Rebus Allaga, acting commander of the Marine Reconfleet.

A firefight, which lasted for almost eight hours, ensued.

Second Sgt. Salonio B. Inla, police chief for the Ampatuan-Datu Municipal Region in Maguindanao, said the armed men were led by Hadji Dima Albad, who was tagged as behind the killing of civilian volunteers, and of burning Bongabong Jan. 28.

The wounded soldiers were identified as Lt. Renan Ortiza, Cpl. Romeo Arellano and Pfc. Ronald Peras. They were brought to the Iligan Sanitarium Hospital. *Jules E. Mapalo, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

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Briton wins Caltex tilt, Que falters

DOUGHERTY holds up the championship trophy after winning the Caltex Masters.

SINGAPORE—England's Mark Dougherty carded a five-under 67 on Sunday, rebounding to a five-shot victory in the Singapore Masters to earn his maiden Tour success.

Dougherty, 22, finished with an 18-under par total at the Laguna National course, overtaking his final round with a superb birdie in the last hole.

Scotland's Colin Montgomerie, the defending champion, bagged second place despite a bogey in a round of 70 to finish second at 13-under, tied with Dustinson Shaw-on Lakhani.

Denmark's Thomas Bjorn, who once led a double bogey on the 15th, finished fourth with a 277 total after a round of 72.

Filipinos Angelo Que-Iroen recovered with a final day 74 to settle up in three-way tie for 15th spot with a 280 total.

The reigning Vietnam Golfering Masters champion had five double bogeys in the front nine that offset four birdies, before carding two more bogeys coming home.

The 26-year old dropped seven of the top 10, a place where he was after turning in 70s in each of the first three rounds.

One-round up tied with Denmark's Soren Hansen (70) and Englishman Graeme McDowell (72).

Dougherty was delighted with his victory which means just a second after finishing fourth at the South African Open.

He took the lead with an eagle on the 15th hole in the second round and never relinquished his position.

"I am honestly delighted," Dougherty said. "The win hasn't quite sunk it yet. When you are playing with players like Colin (Montgomerie) and Thomas (Bjorn), you really don't think it's over till it's over.

"Hopefully this is the start of many great things, and I am very, very pleased that I have won here in a very great place." Reuters

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SPORTSWATCH

Religon Anniversary derby resumes

Action resumes on Wednesday when Tabacalera faces Swire Hotel in the PBA Philippine Cup game at the Araneta Coliseum.

The match is the first of a doubleheader that also features Purefoods Tender Juicy Hotdogs and Air21 Express.

Tabacalera is coming off a 103-96 victory over Red Bull Barako last Friday.

Swire Hotel, on the other hand, is coming off a 101-96 loss to Purefoods Tender Juicy Hotdogs last Friday.

Hide Cebu junior tennis winners

CEBU – Jacob Lagman blasted Ben Raphael, 6-0, 6-0, and John Mark Delos Reyes crushed Jerome Kimura, 6-1, 6-2, in their all-Filipino 2008 season of the Hide Junior Tennis Tropical Regional Workshop at the Cebu Country Club clay courts Saturday. Lagman and Delos Reyes advanced to the semifinal round of the Under-14 singles division.

Chung Kai Shek five nips Salcya

CHUNG KAI SHEK – Chung Kai Shek College (CKSC) Archbishop Reyes Memorial High School defeated Philippine Academy of Sakyo (Salcya) 25-20, 25-20, 25-20 in the final phase of the elimination round in the 2nd Bishop Reyes Cup Inter-School Basketball Tournament held Tuesday.

Littaua, former national caper, dies

ILOILO – Hall of Famer and former national player Pedrito "Bobby" Littaua died in the wee hours of 4:30 a.m. Saturday.

Rotary Run registration up tomorrow

REGISTRATION for the 2008 "Subic Pony Tai Kuibosan" marathon run will be at the Rizal Center of Mt. Annapolis St. in Greenhills, San Juan.

The run will be held on Sunday, January 27, at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

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Eleventh weekly winners Jan. 21 draw:

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2. Zosimo S. Amorin — Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental
3. Ulysses T. Salvaro — Valencia, Negros Oriental
4. Cristeo Rey Fabiola — Tagum City
5. Edgardo S. Manuel — Lingayen, Pangasinan

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LIFE SUCKS
A boy endures the midday sun as he tries to peddle sodas along Session Road in Baguio City.

DepEd reinstates sex harassment convict, then reviews appointment

BAGUIO CITY—The country's first public servant to be charged with sexual harassment has retained in work here, after almost 10 years of litigation, alarming top Baguio-Cordillera groups.

Myrna Bolagui, whose conviction was affirmed by the Supreme Court on Oct. 5, 2004, reclaimed his post as superintendent of the division of schools in Baguio on Dec. 20, 2004, upon the instructions of Education Secretary Florencio Abad.

Bolagui was suspended (stated by Lamentin there elementary school teacher) in 1994.

"I am here only until 56, 14, my birthday, when I turn 65 and retire. I wanted to warm the air over gracefully and with dignity, which is why we can't even get mind of my (suspension)," Bolagui told the bayanan.

But Bolagui may not get his wish.

Officials of the Department of Education are reconsidering Bolagui's appointment, after members of Gabriela in Baguio challenged Abad's decision to reinstate "a convicted sexual harasser."

"Discovery Abad] was not thoroughly advised about Bolagui's legal problems by local politicians who wanted him to retire gracefully," a DepEd official said.

The official said Abad had sent a legal team to review Bolagui's case.

Magdalena Gapisa, a private school principal who sued Bolagui's conviction, said Abad "sent a very bad signal to victims of sexual harassment."

Quoting a Gabriela statement here, Gapisa said Bolagui's retirement was "robbing more advocates for women [of] victims."

Bolagui was also threatened by several school associations, but teachers and school officials who know of his legal situation were ready to protect his return, Gapisa said.

She said she learned of Bolagui's reinstatement when she bumped into him during a recent funeral service.

"It was [awkward], yet I still found my hand as a gesture of [goodwill], and he returned the gesture. See, deep inside, I was not happy," Gapisa said.

She told Bolagui that even if he her an apology, but "this will not affect the pending cases against him."

Ligaya Amante, a public school teacher, first sued Bolagui and won the case before a regional court. The Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's decision.

In October last year, the Supreme Court affirmed a ruling of a three-member team of the defunct Department of Education, Culture and Sports that found Bolagui guilty of sexually harassing Gapisa, and her lawyer Mes Rangayo.

Gapisa was applying for permits for a small school in 1994 when Bolagui made "unwanted sexual advances," said Bengayo.

The team, headed by then Education Undersecretary Antonio Nachor's, recommended the dismissal of Bolagui.

While affirming the team's findings, the high court suspended Bolagui for a year in recognition of his 37 years in government service. Vincent Cabreros, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

ROUNDUP

K9 dogs in Davao

DAVAO CITY—The city government has acquired more K-9 dogs to help police implement the anti-illegal drugs campaign. Lawyer Nilo Abellana, chief of the Science Services Division, said the hounds were donated. The city government spends P40,000 a month for dog food and vitamins taken from the mayor's, police and visitor fund. He said Mayor Rodrigo Duterte does not mind spending a lot for dog food and vitamins if these will be for the campaign against drug trafficking and terrorism.
Anthony U. Alibio, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Bukidnon divided

MALAYBALAY CITY—Bukidnon ranks is deeply divided over who has won the P1-B Rep. Jose Maria Zubiri bid last year. Some 89 Mo. 2003 voters requests for 10 municipalities belonging to southern Bukidnon and call for one province Bukidnon del Sur. These are Maramag, Quezon, Pangantucan, Don Carlos, Kitaotao, Kibawe, Kadingilan, Sibonga, Damulog and Kalilangan. The combined annual income of these towns reaches about P521 million. The population is 322,000. Congress has yet to receive the proposal which entails changing how laws are to be created. Bukidnon is now more than creating another province would spur development in these municipalities.
Alvin Dante Alibio, PDI Mindanao Bureau

New board member

ILIGAN CITY—Romeo Lopez Uy is the new Iligan Bay Authority (IBA) board member representing the city. Uy succeeds the late Ramadan Dayang. The appointment of Dayang, also the former president of the Ilaya Mangyan Association, was signed by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita on Dec. 28 last year. However, Uy is now only able to sit in the Sangguniang Panlungsod last week after Gov. Alfredo Chavez signed his appointment papers. He was on El Shaira delegation's work and vacations to all development programs of the board.
Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

14 cholera cases in Albay

LEGAZPI CITY—The Regional Health Office here confirmed that there were 14 cholera and 126 diarrhea cases in Pioduran, Albay. Dr. Aurora Teresa Bichara, RHO epidemiologist, said they were closely monitoring the diarrhea cases for possible development into cholera. Dr. Luis Dominguez, Manitoba provincial health officer II, said a group said it can say the case found that a water pipe from the town's reservoir that runs through a swampy area was contaminated. Residents said the local government should disinfect the water reservoir of that place to prevent further contamination. Although the figures were high, the provincial health office has not yet declared a cholera outbreak in the town.
Joel U. Barcase, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Church cleaning ritual

CALAMBA CITY—The parish priest of the Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Tanjay, Negros Oriental, led some 600 faithful in a church-church-to-church ritual to expel a spirit after a bank customer was gunned down in front of the church. Rito Alcantara, 51, was shot on Sunday 11 May 30 at Plaza Rizal by unidentified gunmen. Police said they suspect the victim was killed by a hired killer. Witnesses said the gunmen shot Alcantara at close range and fled on board a motorcycle driven by another man. Investigators said the victim was killed by a hired killer. Witnesses said the gunmen shot Alcantara at close range and fled on board a motorcycle driven by another man.
Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

1 NPA rebels slain

LUBANGO—At least two members of the New People's Army were killed in an encounter with government soldiers at about 9:30 a.m. on Jan. 29 at the boundary of Buenavista and Tagoloan towns in Misamis Oriental. An Army report said an army patrol led by 2Lt. Rene Alvaro of Alpha Co. encountered 10 NPA rebels and that the two rebels were killed during a 20-minute firefight. The rebels, he said, were members of The Missing Singles for Peace. Another rebel was killed in a similar encounter in Tagoloan town on Jan. 27.
Jill Kristin Arenas, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Illegal lumber seized in Kudarat

COTABATO CITY—Combined operations of the police and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in central Mindanao seized some 25,000 board feet of illegally-cut lumber in Datu Paglas, Sultan Kudarat, on Friday night.

Jun Sampulna, DENR Central Mindanao director, said the lumber was owned by Kim and Manning Kwok, alleged former local commanders of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the area.

Tip

The lot lumber was confiscated in Sitio Bitaling, Barangay Nagnagan, in Palimbang after a civilian informer tipped off the 36500 regional office.

Sampulna added that only a truckload was brought for evidence and exhibit to the DENR regional office.

The remaining three truckloads were temporarily placed under the custody of the DENR assistance center in Barangay Milbuk, Palimbang.

Sampulna said that prior to the apprehension, he was directed with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) field commander in the area to ensure the safety of his men and the police.

Campaign

The local MILF commander reportedly gave the assurance that nothing would happen to the apprehending men.

The operation, Sampulna disposed, was part of the DENR's intensified campaign against rampant illegal cutting down of trees in Palimbang and other parts of central Mindanao.

Earlier, DENR Secretary Michael Defensor ordered a nationwide crackdown on illegal loggers.

Palimbang is a rich source of lumber because logging projects in cebu and other parts of the country said he have making by several fishing firms here. Agudelo Z. Ze-nio, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Tourists back in Baguio after meningo scare

BAGUIO CITY—Last week, only a little was occupied in a popular restaurant on Legarda Street here because of the meningococcemia scare. A week later, the place was filled to the rafters.

On foot, the whole Legarda Street, where bars and restaurants line up a 100-meter stretch, was back to its party mode.

Hotels and inns also registered a modest rise in admissions from Friday to Sunday. Pensionnes in nearby towns, some coming from as far as Leyte, were also seen shopping in ukay-ukay (used clothes) shops around the city.

After Jan. 24 when the Department of Health downgraded the meningococcemia alert here, tourists have been coming back to the city.

"The tourists have come back," said Northeastern Molintas, Department of Tourism-Cordillera director. "I hope this trend will grow."

Losses

During the meningococcemia alert, Molintas said the tourism industry was losing P80 million a week. She said there was a 90-percent drop in tourist arrivals in early January.

The city also came out with the project "Bloom Baguio Bloom," which promises to revive the local tourism industry, including bringing up a national VIP (very important person) every week.

This week, Sen. Richard Gordon and US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone were the featured visitors.

The Baguio Association of Hotels and Inns (BAHAI) has come out with gimmicks to attract back the tourists, including free one-day stay in selected rooms for a weekend package.

Drumbeaters

From the World Health Organization, which sent an international team of epidemiologists to the city weeks to investigate the particular strain of meningococcal disease, to cause unexpected drumbeaters for Baguio tourism.

Molintas said Dr. Eric Berthiert, a senior epidemiologist of WHO in Geneva, gave her a thumbs-up note saying "Baguio is definitely one of the most destinations."

In its bulletin on Jan. 28, WHO recorded 96 cases of meningococcal disease in the Cordillera from Oct. 1, 2004 to Jan. 28.

It listed 79 cases from Baguio City and Benguet, 22 from Mt. Province and two from Ifugao.

WHO also said there were 32 deaths or a case fatality ratio of 33 percent.

Meningococcal disease can strike in clusters meningococcemia but also bacterial meningitis and septicemia (blood poisoning). However, meningococcemia was more feared because of its high fatality ratio.

In its bulletin on Jan. 19, WHO noted 78 cases of meningococcemia in the Cordillera, including 16 in Baguio.

"The department of health and the local government health authorities, assisted by a team from the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, have established protocols and multidisciplinary operation centers in Mt. Province and Benguet to contain the outbreak," WHO said in its Jan. 28 report.

"Laboratory capacity for the collection and detection of meningococcal diseases and management of cases has been strengthened. Intensive surveillance and contact tracing in the community has also been carried out, while further epidemiological studies are ongoing," it added. Frank Cimatu, *PDI* Northern Luzon Bureau

Planned golf course in Chocolate Hills hit

TAGBILARAN CITY—The provincial chapter of a militant group the organization said the plan to construct a golf course in the Chocolate Hills area showed the government's "real purpose" in placing it under the National Integrated Protected Area System (Nipas) Act.

Bayan Muna Bohol coordinator John Bura warned that if the golf course plan was approved, "farm lands would then be converted and dislocation of farmers [inevitable] to projects like [a] golf course."

Saglayan Mayor Jimmy Torrecampo said the land-based plan to build a "world-class" golf course in the area where the Chocolate Hills is located.

Bohol Gov. Erico Aumentado pledged support for the project while brushing aside apprehensions that the natural wonder in the province would be adversely affected.

Aumentado agreed with Torrecampo that the existence of a golf course in Saglayan "would be beneficial to the people in the area."

Bura, however, pointed out that the target area was covered by Presidential Proclamation (PP) No. 1037 which prohibits the defacement of any of the hills and buffer zones in the list.

He recalled that farmers inside the protected areas had opposed PP 1037 because they could not secure titles to the lands.

The farmers led by the Haggapay sa mga Mag-uumang Bol-anon Alsamahol) feared that if PP 1037 was fully implemented, agricultural development in some portions of the land they were tilling would be banned.

Bura said that because of the strong position and struggle of the farmers under Alsamahol, an affiliate of the militant Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, PP 1037 was amended.

He said the amendment resulted in a reduction of coverage areas, the number of hills, and the area for buffer zones. He did not give specifics.

Bura warned that water would also be a big issue in maintaining a golf course and that "water resources for drinking and [farm use] would then be diverted to [the] golf course use."

He said the implementation of laws could be summed up in the question of "whose interests it would benefit and who will be affected."

"The position of support of Governor Aumentado to the planned golf course shows how his administration is really handling issues of environmental concerns," Bura added. Chito A. Puentes, *PDI* Visayas Bureau

A 10-KILOWATT windmill in Ayaya, Cagayan town, Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte has proven that natural sources of power like wind can energize their homes. RON CASTRO

Wind, hydro power: Energy of the future

By Vincent Cabreza, Cristina Arcadio and Juliet Cataluña
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

IT WILL take more time, but the future may well be in alternative sources of energy.

The Cordilleras, for instance, have the potential to generate up to 500 megawatts of "clean energy." The abundance of rivers in the area can power up a chain of mini-hydroelectric power plants for half of each year. And a wind resource analysis and mapping study conducted for the Philippines by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory has already identified several areas which could benefit from wind power installations.

Last August, the country's first commercial wind-diesel hybrid farm, in Mahatao town in Batanes, started operations. The P56-million facility is powered by three wind turbines donated from France's designed to last between 25 and 30 years.

Officials of the West Philippine Energy Corp., the project designer, said a similar hybrid power facility supplies the power requirements of a hospital and community facilities in Fiji.

At the launch, Energy Secretary Vince Perez said the wind-diesel project would be used as a "living laboratory" for students and could be tapped as one of the province's tourist attractions. If President Macapagal-Arroyo's goal of putting up as much as 345 MW of wind power could be realized by the end of her term in 2010, he said, "the Philippines will be the largest producer of wind power in Asia and the leader [in that aspect] in Batanes."

Wind power is among the more cost-effective renewable technologies available today. According to an online website on wind power, more than 13,000 MW of wind power have already been installed worldwide.

A 25.2-MW wind power plant in Bangui, Ilocos Norte, developed by Northwind Power Development Corp., started operating months. And the state-run Philippine National Oil Co. is developing a separate 42-MW wind farm in nearby Burgos town; it is expected to be operational by March.

"Interest in wind power is increasing as there is now showing that high oil prices will dip. In this oil-dependent generation-driven energy pattern are being made to adapt to prevailing oil prices, the Philippine wind farm is one modest commitment to reducing our dependence on oil," said Ferdinand Dumlao, Northwind chair.

US-funded study

The other areas identified as wind-rich include the Babuyan Islands, also north of Luzon, and the higher interior terrain of Mindoro, Samar, Leyte, Panay, Negros, Cebu, Palawan and eastern Mindanao. (The US Department of Energy sponsored the study for the National Wind Corp.), the Philippine Council for Industry and Energy Research and Development, and PAGC.

Unlike PAGC, which can sell electricity generated from the Burgos facility to users outside Ilocos Norte, power from the Northwind plant will be fed exclusively to the Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative or Ilelco, a local electric utility.

An energy sales agreement between Northwind and Ilelco binds the wind plant developer to operate and maintain the facility and deliver 1 MW of clean energy per hr for 20 years. This is about a third of Ilocos Norte's total power requirement of 26 MW. (A study shows that Ilocos Norte's total power needs is equivalent to the power requirement of 100 Megawatt is Mandaluyong City.)

The cheaper electricity means a 7-percent reduction in power costs from prevailing Napocor rates.

Unlike major hydroelectric plants, which require the environmental destruction of dams, micro-hydros can generate from 100 kW to 10 MW by relying on natural river flow. Best of all, the technology does not alter the water's quality, the river's local habitat or the surrounding air.

Harnessing all of the Cordillera's rivers will generate power bigger than the current output of the San Roque Multipurpose Dam project or the Pangalusian-Binga-Ambuklao Dam project, the Pangalusian-Binga Irrigation and Power project in Ilocos Norte, said Jesse Ronquillo, chief operating officer of the Manila-owned hydroelectric Development Corp. (Sidebar)

But the low investment in micro-hydro may soon be meeting one of the Cordilleras' Ronquillo lamented.

Ilocos is a Davao-based power firm that relocated to Benguet before the 1990s power crisis struck. Despite a history of strong local opposition to some marine projects, because of the government's conservation of massive hydroelectric dams in the 1950s and 1960s, Ilocos struck it out with micro-hydro.

Ronquillo recalled being chased out of Benguet towns when I before they offered to build mini-hydro systems in 1989, after being told that Ilocos were displaced by the 75-MW Ambuklao Dam (which was built in 1954) and the 130-MW Binga Dam (which was built some 15 years after Ambuklao).

It took a decade for Benguet residents to settle up to the Ilocos' concept of "clean energy."

Since 1990, Ilocos has rehabilitated 11 old hydro plants in Benguet. The company generates 30.25 MW of electricity a year, the worst that had three plants have also grown economically.

Ilocos also boasts the 8.6-MW Bendasoc II, Bangla plant, the 2.4-MW Lower Labay plant, and the 2.6-MW Low-cay plant.

Sablan, Tuba and La Trinidad towns have the Baguio government's 4-MW Asin plants, the 10.75-MW Binga plants and the 8-MW Sangchan plant.

Ballungs, whose river sources are some of the most primitive in the country, has outgrown most of its outgrings about power facilities on account of the Benguet example, and has invited Ilocos to put up power plants, Ronquillo said.

But most of Ilocos's future expansions are being schemed back to Davao, Ronquillo said.

Unclear support

He lamented that the government's unclear support for clean energy is driving away power from the countryside, where electricity is much needed.

Malacañang is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks a global reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, but is set aside such provisions when it proceeded to refurbish the power service, he said.

Ronquillo said the government would still need to increase the value of clean energy or new and renewable power projects like hydro and geothermal plants.

"It is still cheaper to operate a 100-MW coal plant than a bunch of mini-hydros," Ronquillo said.

"[But] if the government will consider all the cost that goes into a coal-fired plant... pollution, the introduction of greenhouse gases—there must be [a] level playing field for competition," he said.

Most of the mini-hydro facilities in the Philippines are based in rural areas, Ronquillo said. Their combined output accounts for no more than 2 percent of the total electricity produced today.

"If the government considers [the National Transmission Corp. or Transco] to buy that 2 percent, you can more than double [the renewable energy] that is produced today," he said.

The law does not exempt new and renewable energy plants from additional fees covering the distribution of hydro-produced or geothermal energy, he added.

Also, Ronquillo said, it made it difficult for distributors to buy power from mini-hydros, he said, because the state-run firm needs to retain and develop high-profile purchase contracts to make itself attractive to customers.

"What we could do is run the [mini-hydros] during the rainy season, and some in with preferential plants during summer, it works, because geothermal facilities can more power. If you don't use it today, it's done tomorrow. The rain will rise [system of all mini-hydros is different], if you don't use it today, it is gone tomorrow," he said.

Natural gas

The alternative source of energy most often cited is non-renewable, however.

The $4.5-billion Malampaya Deep Water Gas-to-Power has added "clean" natural gas to the country's power mix since 2002.

Methane, the major component of natural gas, has been dubbed the "fuel of the future" on the "green" fuel because of its clean qualities. According to a Department of Energy study, the use of natural gas would also help lower carbon dioxide emissions in the country by at least five million tons annually. With co-report from Jimmie Tremas *& Los Baños and Madonna T. Virola, PDI* Southern Luzon Bureau

The Preventable Crisis

No risk, no gain sure path to failure

Previous page A30

politicized mind-change. Within that period, the road map for change should be clear.

In the case of the second Arroyo presidency, the picture we get is incremental, not dramatic, change. It is a picture of a believed presidency almost doomed to a shift less early for its own good.

This grueling philosophy of the administration course is for to avoid making political risks.

Dangers of playing safe

Playing safe, so would errors, might work well if one is ahead, but the administration is not ahead. It is, in fact, struggling and playing catch-up.

In how overtook much in office, the satisfaction rating in public opinion polls on her performance has plummeted to its lowest level compared to ratings of at least three previous presidents in a similar period.

In sports, as much as in politics, when one is behind in the score cards, percentage playing to the obvious strategy to build up a substantial lead. Sometimes, the best defense is a good offense.

Arroyo's "Hello" Barbers, Espina has declined on Saturday to abandon to join the 2007 elections, from the executive race down.

If it's anything we really need most, that's because the group will only settle for a low good men and women who will resist the perks of power. It hopes that by 2007, it will have established a 12 member-organization with a solid participation base from the rest—by shunning pork barrel funds.

"We will put together a full slate of seven leaders who will go against the pork barrel system," Barbers said during a party meeting at a business man's house in Greenhills, San Juan.

Bagatsing took itself as a "viable alternative to the existing political structure and undemocratic practices, a party for the former that appeals to nonconventional politicians and electorate."

The abolition of the pork barrel system is among its 22 objectives.

The party was actually established in 2003 but failed to organize for the May elections last year. It was accredited by the Commission on Elections on May 8—barely two days before polling day.

Making a difference

Some 38 members—mostly businessmen, lawyers and civic leaders—mapped out their strategy on Saturday to build up a nationwide base of voters and potential candidates. They also identified the various distribution of membership forms and pamphlets.

Also known as the alliance for Common Good, Bagatsing believes in the premise, as Barbers put it, "the root cause of the country's problems is moral."

"What will make us different from the other parties) is that we initiated platforms is clear and specific, aimed at reducing the corruption good, promoting the culture of virtue and the politics of duty," he said.

Between now and the next election season, the group will engage in a campaign for voter education and "spread out benefiting principles and political platforms, informing our people where the party proposes to lead the country," Barbers said.

Party objectives

The group, which considers itself ecumenical although more Catholic in membership despite, has for its "Objective No. 1" a families Biblical passage: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you."

The rest are, well, quite specific: Injustice, since it has placed many here in power, will try to "dismantle social structures that glorify greed, sex and pornography, the cultures of death and violence, war, materialism and hedonism."

It will scrap the death penalty, promote national health planning (such as the ban "specific Elder Strategy" whose main aim is to inflict violence and injustice on the opponent."

It will disapprove of "all forms of gambling" and the "unwholesome practice of setting up billboards naming public officials responsible for is government projects."

It will call for an "end to the practice of appointing former military officials as secretary of defense." While on the subject, why not "rename" that agency to "Department of Peace?" is suggested.

Character change first

The party will propose that elected or appointed public officials not be allowed to write columns, appear in movies, TV and ads, or work as for-hard core commentators.

Barbers said that while Bagatsing learned something the Constitution, "because will not fail if we can't do it now. Because there should be character change first, before we have Charter change."

Barbers, 72, said that while the party would start looking for people to field in the next elections, its "immediate concern" is voter.

He said the group would link up with churches and would support clergymen to be among its leaders or co-aders.

"Let's make this the mission of the laity, bishops, priests and nuns do by themselves," he told his party-mates.

Party guns for '07 polls, bars pork lovers, 'trapos'

Previous page A30

the dirty tricks of trops (traditional) politics.

Founded by pro-ousted Ilditpan Bayanihi "Barbers" Barbers, Espina declined on Saturday to abandon to join the 2007 elections, from the executive race down.

If it's anything we really need most, that's because the group will only settle for for a low good men and women who will resist the perks of power. It hopes that by 2007, it will have established a 12 member-organization with a solid participation base from the rest—by shunning pork barrel funds.

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Making a difference

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7-11 February 2005
24th Year Conference Room, UP Law Center

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07 February 2005	Civil Procedure and Recommended Jurisprudence (Rules 1 to 71)	Three (3) 09:00 to 12:00	Justice Jose L. Sabio, Jr.
	Special Proceedings and Recommended Jurisprudence (Rules 1 to 109)	Three (3) 01:00 to 04:00	Prof. Marvic M.V.F. Leonen
08 February 2005	Criminal Law (Book I)	Three (3) 09:00 to 12:00	Justice Oswaldo D. Agcaoili
	Criminal Law (Book II)	Three (3) 01:00 to 04:00	Justice Hugo E. Gutierrez
09 February 2005	Labor Standards and Social Legislation	Three (3) 09:00 to 12:00	Atty. Cesar C. Sevilleja
	Labor Relations, Including Recommended Jurisprudence (Book V, Presidential Decree No. 442, as amended)		
	Labor Relations, Including Recommended Jurisprudence (Book V, Presidential Decree No. 442, as amended)	Three (3) 01:00 to 04:00	Asst. Executive Secretary Renato Corpuz
10 February 2005	Taxation Law (Comprehensive)	Three (3) 09:00 to 12:00	Justice Oswaldo D. Agcaoili
	Taxation Law (Comprehensive)	Three (3) 01:00 to 04:00	Justice Hugo E. Gutierrez
11 February 2005	Commercial Law (Book I)	Three (3) 09:00 to 12:00	Prof. Jose C. Vitug
	Commercial Law (Book II)	Three (3) 01:00 to 04:00	Prof. Jose C. Vitug

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Major players elude gov't drive against illegal logging in Aurora

Front page 1

has been for decades tried to establish more than just formal ties with politicians and bureaucrats who could open the gates to the country's vast forest land.

The perception, at least within the DENR, is that such ties come in handy whenever the department decides to implement rules by the book, or when government decides to crack down on errant loggers—something that seems to happen seasonally and relatively less usually after a disaster and a significant loss of lives.

Focus on hot logs

In the current anti-illegal logging campaign, for example, Defensor has so far turned in mostly on those found in possession of "hot logs" or illegally cut trees, mainly by medium-sized local operators who lack the permits required for logging in reality, however, the violators include big well-connected companies with government-approved concessions covering thousands of hectares of forest land or wealthy families which can solid permits to cut trees in areas they are not supposed to touch.

By definition of the Forestry Management Bureau, an illegal logger is anyone who cuts and harvests trees in violation of forestry laws, rules and regulations. This includes those who may hold legal concessions to cut trees but violate the terms and conditions of their tree-cutting permits.

DENR bureaucrats say this was exactly why Tupitin's harvesting activities were suspended almost two years ago: a team of foresters from Baler and the regional office had found the company to have committed various violations, including the cutting of trees beyond its borders in Dipaculao town, thereby encroaching on land that was already part of Quirino.

The team even recommended that the DENR consider the "issuance ... cancellation" of Tupitin's Ellen, which had been issued to mask pan months earlier by then Secretary Elisea Gozun's own predecessor at the DENR, Heherson Alvarez.

Sta Rita is an agreement with the government, allowing private entities to exclusively "develop, manage, protect and utilize" a specific piece of "forest land of the public domain," for a period of 25 years (renewable for another 25). Under the agreement, the government and the private company or individuals agree to share the fruits of the land.

Soft on Tupitin

DENR insiders say that although the foresters' report put Tupitin in an unflattering light, the company has not found support higher up in the bureaucracy.

In August 2004, a memorandum from Gozun signed by nine environment undersecretary and assistant secretary and two directors dispelled the foresters' findings, and even reprimanded them for commenting on matters that were supposedly outside their area of concern.

The four officials were soft on Tupitin, and yet played safe. "We find no serious ground that would warrant the cancellation of Sta Rita ... [SIC] CLC ... in the same vein, we find no reason to lift suspension of the order suspending the harvesting operations of Tupitin," they said.

The officials said Tupitin's suspension could be lifted after a review of its Comprehensive Development and Management Plan (CDMP). Any Sta Rita should be based on such a plan, which is drawn for the area approved by the DENR.

A department insider, though, says Gozun sat on the officials' memo and decided to leave the matter for her successor, which turned out to be Defensor, to resolve.

Requirements fulfilled

All this time, the company had continued cutting trees since only its harvesting operations had been suspended. Tupitin owner Belen Chua, however, says the Sun. decided to move away from the area near Quirino, which she describes as a complicated boundary dispute.

Chua adds that the company complied with the requirements for a lifting of the suspension, including revising the company's CDMP.

"Before Gozun left, we fulfilled all the requirements," says Chua. "But just didn't mean to sign it because it would appear to be a midnight deal."

She denies that her company is logging illegally. Although Tupitin has been in the wood processing business for the past 14 years, she says that it was only three years ago that her family decided to cut and harvest logs themselves in Dipaculao.

Chua notes that Tupitin has provided employment to some 100 beneficiaries since it started operations in 2002.

"These provisions need the jobs," she says, pointing out that provinces like theirs are among the poorest in the country. Otherwise, she says, residents resort to theft and crimes, including illegal logging.

Chua says that Tupitin is being dragged unjustly into the mess of illegal logging, and that the crackdown has adversely affected the wood and lumber business. Because of the nationwide suspension of milling permits re-Acted recently by President Macapagal-Arroyo, wood has been harder to come by.

Chua reveals that lumber is now 20 percent more expensive, and the illegal loggers who defy the President's orders have been selling their products for as much as P65 per board foot when it used to be just P26.

Before the suspension on cutting, lumber was P38 per board foot, according to Chua, foreign firms from countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are the ones now reaping the benefits of a dearth of local wood, and are stepping up lumber exports to the Philippines to fill the vacuum.

Defensor's neighbor

Chua denies reaping benefits from any ties with any official. She says that Defensor was not present at the wedding that had taken place before the latest secret tragedy viewed as logging. But the environment secretary himself admits it, and even explains that he stood as sponsor there because one of the Chua sisters, Pauline, is his neighbor at an exclusive village in Quezon City.

He says, however, that there was no wedding gift from the DENR. "Tupitin was never allowed to operate," he says.

Still, the situation has improved for Tupitin under his watch. His subordinates signed for the full resumption of Tupitin's activities. Regional officials recommended, as a pretty quote to the lifting of the suspension, approval of Tupitin's CDMP for its three areas.

Defensor admits having signed the CDMP but says he withheld approval on the number of trees—called allowable cut—the company is authorized. As far as he is concerned, though, the issue is "moot and academic," since the President has imposed a moratorium on the permits to cut trees all over the country.

Chua, for her part, says Tupitin was able to secure a lifting of the suspension on harvesting activities, but that such operations are now at a standstill. She also says her company has stopped selling trees as well, in compliance with the President's order.

Turning a blind eye

Technically holders of timber and forestry permits who violate the terms are supposed to be the easiest to catch. This is because, Defensor says, "they have done agreements with the government, and definite areas of operations." Besides, they are supposed to follow definite procedures when obtaining such permits.

But DENR officials are not always alert for such violations, and some even help logging companies commit them.

In early 2003, the same team of foresters that documented the violations on Tupitin's boundaries had also recommended the filing of formal charges against the regional, provincial and community environment officers who oversaw Tupitin's Ilena operations. The foresters said these officials became responsible for "rampant illegal logging" for failing to fulfill their duties.

Apparently these local and regional environment officers had either missed or turned a blind eye to Tupitin's failure to hold consultations with the community as required by law. A public meeting on the Tupitin Ilena was held in Barangay Dimabuloan in Dipaculao only on April 29, 2003, several months after the Ilena had already been approved by Secretary Alvarez.

The minutes of that meeting show local leaders asking environment officials why the application of Tupitin was approved without public consultations. The provincial environment officer's response: "There were consultations [by barangay officials] ... and the municipal government ... of Dipaculao [which] endorsed to the application [of Tupitin]. So duly elected officials they have the right to decide regarding the issue and this was the basis used by the DENR in approving the ECC [environmental compliance] application of Tupitin."

Identical resolutions

The minutes, however, discovered that the resolutions from the three barangay councils concerned appeared to be identical in number and the wording. "The team concluded that DENR employees, together with Tupitin-Lumber personnel there," they said in their report.

"They had with them the prepared resolutions when they went around and consulted the barangay council members and got the respective signatures regarding the endorsement of the LGUs [local government units] for the application of Tupitin for Ilena, which should not be the case."

Chua insists, "We have complied with the conditions of our Ilena." This includes witnessing some parts of her company's logging area. With cutting activities suspended, she says her company is keeping itself busy planting pinelim trees, whose wood is popular among furniture makers.

(To be continued.)

ADRIFT. Part of logs that clogged the river channel of Lagawe-sa Dingalan, Aurora, after it was hit by Tropical Depression "Winnie."

PHOTO BY [illegible]

8 KEYS TO YOUR DIFFERENT INTERESTS

Only from INQUIRER

$60-M pearl tied to misfortunes

Front page 1

for generations; the ramifications on its surface resemble the human brain.

According to legend, the pearl was lost in a shipwreck centuries ago, then found in 1956 off Palawan by a diver who drowned when he reached into a huge clam to take it.

The clam and the diver were pulled to shore and the island's chief, a Muslim, took possession of the pearl and named it.

History turns bloody

About five years later, William Donnell Cobb saved the life of the chief's son and was given the pearl in gratitude. Cobb's heirs sold it in 1990 for $300,000 to Beverly Hills jeweler Victor Hoffman who, in turn, sold part of its ownership to the Hinds.

The two men formed the now defunct Montebello Largest Pearl Co. Inc. in California and raised money by selling interests in the pearl to investors, including Joe Bonwell.

This is where the history turns bloody.

$31.4-M judgment

The pearl is now part of the largest wrongful-death judgment in Colorado history after a jury recently awarded $31.4 million to Bonwell's adult children.

The children said their father's estate let the 1976 death of their mother, which they claimed was a contract killing.

When the father died in 1998, police said they determined that the decades-old killing was cast behind on Bonwell's orders.

Now his children want the pearl sold so that they would be paid the settlement they won against their father's estate. They plan to use the money to establish a foundation in their mother's name to help abused women and children, said their lawyer Richard Segerstrom.

Pearl to go

Bonwell left his estate to his youngest daughter, whom he fathered with his second wife.

Segerstrom said he first must submit proof that his claim would receive their money—but it would have to include selling the pearl.

Hoffman, who still owns part of the pearl, wants to buy out it—for no less than $60 million.

"We are demanding that pearl," he said. "We don't want the money for it. We want it to go to charity for everybody to see and enjoy rather in a museum or a presidential library." AP

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METRO
Editor Ester G. Olpoco ■ Assistant Editor Connie B. Bino

Chaos seen with TRO on 3 MMDA schemes

By Margaux C. Dela

EXPECT chaos back in the streets and in recovering confiscated licenses once temporary restraining order (TRO) on three key Metro Manila traffic schemes takes effect.

That was the warning aired by Chair Nestor Fernandez of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

He said, "The absence of an effective traffic scheme would mean chaos."

Fernandez was referring to the Metropolitan Traffic Ticketing System (MTTS), the Physical Coupon Delivery and the Odd/Even Registered Vehicle Scheme.

On Thursday, Judge Ernani Jose Cruz-Pano, of the Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 149, issued a 20-day TRO on the three MMDA traffic schemes.

The restraining order was in response to a petition by nine transport groups which claimed that the implementation of the schemes trampled on "their constitutional right to due process which consequently includes their right to life."

Groups that sought the TRO are the Pinagsang Samahan ng mga Tsuper Operator Nation-wide (PISTON), Philippine Confederation of Drivers and Operators Alliance of Concerned Transport Operators (PCDO ACTO), Alliance of Transport Operators and Drivers Association of the Philippines (Alldrap), Federation of Jeepney Operators and Drivers Association (Fejoda), Mabuhi Jeepney Operator and Driver Alliance (MAODA), Integrated Metro Manila Operators-Inside Lanes (Imolane), North East Manila Bus Operation Coop (Nembing) and Northeast Line Operators Association of the Philippines (PNAAP).

Fernandez lamented the court's decision, saying "I would not believe that the judge would issue such an order considering how important and effective the traffic schemes are."

He added, "It is unbelievable that the court would allow traffic to be used by transport groups, which have been unwarranted."

The chair explained that with the schemes, the MMDA encouraged some operators/ illegal drivers like their confiscated licenses and cars of late units.

Up to yesterday, however, the MMDA had yet to receive a copy of the TRO, the implementation of which is dependent on the posting-up of a P100,000 bond by the petitioning transport groups.

The bond, the court said, was to cover damages that the MMDA might incur due to the issuance of the TRO.

But the TRO on the schemes was the least of the MMDA and the motoring public's problems.

The suspension of the traffic schemes would mean going back to old ways of doing things, according to MMDA General Manager Bebot Hizon-Jimenez.

For one, the suspension of the MTTS would mean the resumption of license confiscation and the issuance of traffic violation receipts. These, in turn, would entail drivers lining up again at MMDA redemption centers.

And that is where real trouble begins.

With the implementation of the MTTS last year, the MMDA shut down its nine license redemption centers in Metro Manila.

The centers were closed because some say the MTTS, traffic violators may only accept tickets for which corresponding fines could be paid at any of the hundreds of branches of a local bank.

During the effectivity of the TRO, drivers whose licenses would be confiscated would all have to line up at one place: the MMDA office in Makati City, which the agency plans to use as a temporary redemption center.

"Most (violators) surely be in a concentrated location instead of merely paying their traffic fines at any Metrobank branch, they would have to line up with close to a single redemption center," Fernandez said.

Businessmen getting instant treat in Manila

By Terry V. Quismundo

EVERYTHING is going instant.

Businessmen in Manila returning documents or opening a new enterprise can get their permits and licenses as soon as they pay the required fees.

This was the assurance of the city's so-called Pre-Approved Instant System (PIPS) as announced by Mayor Lito Atienza in a press statement.

"This is meant to make it easier to do business in Manila," said Atienza.

He explained that it was aimed at reducing red tape and minimizing the opportunity for graft.

The mayor was referring to the practice of inspectors of demanding money from business owners for them to give an approval to their application.

Initially, the scheme was enjoyed by only the upper 20 percent of Manila's business taxpayers, a population of some 8,000 businesses.

To have an even more productive environment for business in Manila, the city's Business Permissions and Development Office (BPDO) expanded the system this year to all businesses in the city, numbering roughly 58,000.

Under the streamlined system, a business license would only have to follow three steps: application, fee assessment, then payment.

Once a business owner completes the procedure, the BPDO readily issues the business permit.

Last year, business permit applications or renewals required business owners to submit documents from the Department of Trade and Industry, previous receipts and permits, barangay clearance and documents pertaining to their tax returns.

Establishments also had to undergo inspections, a gold mine for corrupt inspectors that used the procedure as an opportunity to earn money on the side.

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QC street: 2 killings in 7 hours

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

CLOSING this scene? Be careful.

Two men were stabbed dead in separate incidents the other night and early yesterday morning while they were on Don Villarosa Street in Barangay Culiat, Novaliches, Quezon City.

Michael Angelo Bautista, 19, was walking on the same street at about 8:30 p.m. yesterday when attacked by a lone suspect.

He had just come from school and was on his way home.

The suspect pulled out a knife and demanded Bautista's valuables, wallet and bag, the Criminal Police Office-4 reported yesterday.

When Bautista resisted, the robber stabbed him in the right side of his body.

Bautista managed to go to the Novaliches Hospital, police said. But he died while undergoing treatment.

Seven hours later, construction worker Apolinar Sioson, 36, was stabbed dead by a group of men.

Police said Sioson had just stepped out of the gate of his house on Don Villarosa at about 4 a.m. yesterday when a group of five men attacked him.

One of the men stabbed the victim in his stomach.

Sioson was brought to the Novaliches Hospital where he was declared dead on arrival, police said.

Rodjun Nelson, a security officer in Barangay Culiat, told the Inquirer that the street had become notorious for robbery incidents.

He said that various gangs also frequent the area.

Needy cabbie returns reporter's valuables

By Irene C. Perez

COMBO hunk in her office on a hot midday night after a coverage in The Fort, Taguig City, became Librada Justice Cheelan V. Mirel initiated that her bag was somehow lighter.

She tried, she checked her stuff and panicked when she realized that she left her branded purse containing some P1,200 cash, identification cards, ATM card and credit cards in the taxi she took from Taguig.

Thirty minutes later, a man of medium height and in his 30s knocked on the big door of her and related Mirel's ordeal.

Text driver Epaminio Carrero refused to take the money Mirel was offering as a reward, but later gave in.

He reasoned that he did not have a regular job and his children could not go to it.

Carrero, a former seaman, currently earns a living as a round-in driver for his brother's fish company and only gets to work when one of his regular's turnout makes it.

Another envelope board

"A few days after I returned that wallet, I found an envelope containing documents and some letters from abroad in my taxi and considered it as an opportunity," he said in Filipino.

He is another tale of a dynamic overseas Filipino worker who is in the ranks of the unemployed today.

Carrero, in an interview yesterday said he stumbled a number of jobs in his 11 years in Libya, where he spent three of those years as an illegal alien or, in street-speak, a TNT (tago nang tago).

He started off as a construction worker for a church employed in Libya in the late '80s, Carrero said. There, he met a Filipina nurse who later became his wife. But upon getting birds in their eldest and three a pair of twins, his wife surrendered to overseas duties.

From construction, his interest shifted to food while helping out in a catering pinch-hitter.

He attended cooking classes in the Philippines, and later served as a cook for a ship's cruise. His contract expired in 2000.

He has been without a steady job since.

Twins stopped schooling

"My 16-year-old twins have stopped going to school. They said they want to work for a fast-food outlet in Bohol but I wouldn't allow them," Carrero said in Filipino.

His eldest son also works as a driver.

He has a year-old baby with his second wife, a 20-year old adorable.

"Walang rumanda mag-an (We tried to grow old alone)," Carrero said, adding that his baby has not been baptized yet because they have financial problems.

It's tough to find a job nowadays, Carrero said. While his three children by his first wife are in Bohol and his new family is in Negros Occidental, he still tries to send money home to stay in Manila waiting for replies from companies he applied with.

"I want to be a seaman-chef," he said with an excited tone. "Specially its' ang mga pagkain ng mga puti (I specialize in European dishes)."

But for now, Carrero said he just wanted a regular cab to drive, saying the units he drives around the streets are not too attractive to passengers.

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MetroBriefs

Bank rob foiled

THE REAL police said United yesterday a bank robbery in Pasay City. The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority said the folks of Rizalito Cruz, 40, were saved that the bank's branch.

Irene C. Perez

Cop kills robbers

A POLICEMAN shot and killed two alleged holdup men on Road 10, Tondo, Manila, Saturday night. Investigators said Dino suspects robbed the passengers of a jeepney at about 8:30 p.m. Senior police officer PO3 Joel Bordon of the Northern Police District. After the robbery, Bordon accosted the suspects. It ended out around and resulted in the death of two suspects Ricardo Crisostomo and Benjamin Abaro, police said. The third suspect managed to flee.

Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

MCS homecoming

THE MALAYA Catholic School is hosting its 80th foundation anniversary with an alumni homecoming today and runs up to Feb. 4. The grand homecoming will be on Feb. 3. The special ceremonies will be this afternoon at the MCS campus. For details, call Grace or Tony at 525-1451 or 895-9, 895-9000. Mass Services at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 3 at Mall Wing of 2017-9400.

Letran assembly

CELEBRATION San Juan de Letran Anniversary Batch '75 and high school batch '80 will hold its general assembly on Feb. 2 at the Letran campus in Intramuros. For inquiries, call Rolly Angeles Medina at 632-8826 or 301-1, 63-8826; or John Gomez at 632-0857 or 0905-3936 07.

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TOSHIBA

BSP chief says peso can reach 53:$1

By Doris C. Dumlao

GOVERNOR Rafael Buenaventura of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas sees the peso appreciating further to the 53 level against the US dollar this year if the government can meet its commitment to raise P80 billion in fresh annual revenues.

Buenaventura stressed that foreign funds were pouring back into the country, with net portfolio inflow ranging to $447.2 million in the first three weeks of January.

"This represents a very strong opening for the year, particularly in comparison to the $223 million remittance net inflow for the comparable period in 2004 and the $486.8 million figure for the whole of 2004," Buenaventura said.

The peso closed at 55.09 on Friday after hitting a high of 53.07/$1, indicating that a breakout into the 54 level may happen very soon, currency traders said.

The local currency, which closed at 56.24 at end-December, has thus gained more than P1 since the start of the year.

Asked about his forecast forecast for the rest of 2005, Buenaventura told reporters: "If there are really lots of inflow and if we achieve the objective on the fiscal side (here) really is no reason why we shouldn't be below (at) 53."

He said the local currency should strengthen past P54 if the government could get enough tax reform measures passed to generate P80 billion. Likewise, to work on the peso's favor would be the privatization of the generation and transmission assets of National Power Corp., he said.

All throughout the region, Buenaventura also said the market was bullish on Asian currencies because of the expectation that China may be forced to free the yuan from its pegged to $8 dollar.

With foreign inflow returning to the country, Buenaventura said the BSP may be able to maintain its foreign reserves at the $16-bil lion level this year.

Of the great "bet" money inflow since the start of the year, about $1 percent went to the Philippine

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Downgrade won't affect RP credit standing abroad, says US bank

By Michelle V. Rivera

THE PHILIPPINES will regain the confidence of the foreign credit market, despite the blow of a credit rating downgrade, according to US-based investment bank Bear, Stearns & Co. Inc.

The investment firm also said that the country is safe from big solvency problems, at least in the short run.

"We are little likelihood that the Philippines will face a foreign liquidity crisis in the near term – given its strong external performance – or produce a default scenario," Bear, Stearns said in its latest paper on the Philippine economy.

The one-notch downgrade, from BB to BB-, by ratings firm Standard & Poor's was not all that bad for the country because the market had expected a two-month decline in the country's long-term foreign debt rating, the bank said.

It added that the decision of S&P to retain its "stable" outlook on the Philippines was received positively by the market.

An outlook of "stable" means that the country's credit rating is not facing a possible downgrade in the near term.

Last week, the Philippine government was able to sell $1.5 billion worth of dollar-denominated global bonds during a debt offering which was well received by foreign bond investors. The market practically dragged off the recent credit downgrade and scrambled for the 10 debt papers, which would mature in 2030.

The government originally planned to borrow only $1 billion, but the high volume of bids encouraged it to raise $1.5 billion from the debt offering. Yields for the recent bond flaot reached 10 billion. The government was able to sell the bonds at a yield of 9.5 percent.

"We see more value in the longer end of the Philippines' sovereign bond curve, which tends to be favored by offshore investors, although we note that domestic investors prefer to stay in the shorter dated Philippine 9% and 11s (bonds maturing in 2009 and 2011), saving to protect liquidity of these issues," the bank said.

According to Bear, Stearns, the international capital market was also encouraged by the government's positive fiscal data for 2004. Last year, the national government's budget deficit stood at only P186.1 billion, or way below the official target of P207.8 billion.

The country's GDP for last year was estimated to reach 6.2 percent, or higher than the target of 4.9 to 5.8 percent. The actual GDP figure for 2004 will be announced today.

DOF: VAT passage will bring down deficit

THE NATIONAL government's budget deficit for 2005 may be further reduced from the new 3-year target of P186 billion when Congress passes the latest value-added tax (VAT) rate from 10 to 12 percent.

The Department of Finance said the revenue from the proposed VAT hike had not been taken into account when the budget deficit target was lowered from the original P384.3 billion due to the passage of the net income law and some administrative measures.

With the VAT increase, the Arroyo administration is expecting P53 billion in additional revenue each year. If the bill gets past Congress early in the year, the government's deficit picture may improve to P133 billion. This may also further accelerate the attainment of the zero deficit goal, which the government set in 2013.

"Our fiscal assumptions for 2006 will do not include the increase to 10E," outgoing Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong told reporters. "If our reform program will be implemented, we can further improve on our deficit."

In February, Amatong will be replaced by Cesar Purisima.

But the Arroyo administration has met strong opposition over the proposed VAT hike. While the Senate has already passed the 10E, critics have vowed to block it passage in the House.

They said the VAT increase would be too much of a burden for consumers.

They described the 10E hike, which is expected to generate the biggest revenue among the Arroyo administration's tax proposals, as an anti-poor measure because the VAT would be passed on by businesses to consumers.

But Amatong said the government would include safeguards should the 10E hike be implemented. She said agricultural products and basic food items would be exempted from the tax. Michelle S. Rivera

Do something about ATM raps, BSP urges bankers

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas has urged local banks to address snowballing customer complaints over automated teller machine (ATM) charges.

In a speech before the Bank Marketing Association of the Philippines, BSP Deputy Governor Armando Tetangco Jr. told the BSP had been swamped with complaints over ATMs, particularly on the deductions made for the use of the machines.

He urged bank officials to maintain the posting of ATM charges in all their branches.

By making the fees more transparent, the consumer may decide whether or not to use a particular machine, he said.

Tetangco also proposed the creation of a "grievance mechanism" to process complaints.

While banks do not charge the use of ATMs by their own account holders, they may varying fees when their machines are used by depositors of other banks. While fees in interconnection between some of the ATM networks, the charge goes even higher when another network is used.

After the speech, Tetangco told reporters the BSP could not compel the banks to lower the ATM fees as the institution would not intervene in free-market pricing. At the very least, he said, consumers must be protected by making fees and charges transparent.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura himself is pushing for the merger of the three ATM networks in the country—Bancnet, Megalink and Expressnet—to boost efficiency and savings.

Tetangco also reminded the banks to comply with the new regulations on credit card cullection. While the BSP does not condone credit card defaults, it also did not favor illegal collection methods, he stressed.

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There is a First American in investment banking, a First American insurance company, a First American investment banking firm, a First American investment (a small real estate company in Arizona), and a First American Investments, found in the "SignUP Report" on a construction blog site.

According to Jasmine Sanchez, CAP-gate the Securities and Exchange Commission a California address for its little-known American entity.

If this is correct, the chestnut citing the web search efforts is a "First American Investments LLC," a mortgage lender specializing in real estate loans, with an office address in Oxnard, a three-minute drive away in Orange County from tourists drive through to reach Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, and the beaches.

According to the bewildered Wilton Pope, First American Investments' neighboring business is the Internet address include social-cause events, a car-repair shop, and the state home racing board.

Hauled over the coals

THE HEAD of the Philippine Stock Exchange electronic department, Pamela Quiaoit-Labayen, wants to Semirara Coal Corp. to inquire about Pelaez's report in this column, specifically about the allegation that the country's largest coal mine has not publicly disclosed run-coast cases has sworn a tooth of its raising claim.

Semirara never back, pointing that as early as October 2004, the company had already submitted to Labayen's department disclosure statements on the pending lawsuit cases.

The PSE disclosure department apparently disliked the two reports, deeming them unimportant to have them posted to the Internet page, despite their potential adverse impact on the mining company's revenues.

Semirara corporate secretary filed that it also reported that the same information had been detailed in the offering prospectus handed out to international investors.

COCKTALES

Victor C. Aguirre

Strangely, these very same disclosures were omitted in the publicly available quarterly and annual reports submitted by Semirara, which is partly owned and represented in the board by the government's National Development Co., to the PSE.

Buffeted by hungry fans

LE soufflé Ortigas had to turn away scores of customers after lunch Friday after food ran out despite what was supposed to have been an all-day 27-dish farewell buffet.

Chef Jessie Sincioco had to send assistants to the market purchase to restock the kitchen in time for dinner.

For P1,000/head, unlimited wine and drinks included, scores of fans paid the ultimate tribute, converging to the food ladies tables again and again, savoring the last gustatory delights of their four-year romance with the French bistro cafe before it closed a sixth-story chapter in Ortigas.

A version of continuing saga, Le Soufflé has found a new shelter in Rockwell, where it shall operate the Fernando's restaurant starting on Feb. 8. The exclusive club, according to the grapevine, has decided to re-open the new Le Soufflé in two months or so as well.

And as the unplanned repose of the Asian Development Bank and nearby residents, Le Soufflé just might return to an Ortigas address, or sadly at least your perhaps, as fire landlords have already proposed luscious offer terms of her soul-seduced diaspora same out.

Heard through the grapevine

DARWIN George Ty has been elected to the board of the Shanghai World Financial Center, at 101 stories and 492 feeters is destined to become the world's tallest building when it opens in 2008.

The largest but potentially been invited to the Shanghai project by no less than Mikuni Mori, the Japanese real estate magnate that controls the sprawling Mori Building Group of Japan.

[illegible] architect, philosophical doer or [illegible] politician [illegible]

BSP chief says peso . . .

Stock Exchange while 29 percent were to fund mutual market investments such as government securities.

Foreign buying has lifted the PSE composite index past the 2000 mark for the first time in five years.

Businessmen said the strong inflow despite the BSP's decision to maintain key interest rates at the same levels since July 2003, proved that the differentials were still comfortable despite the US Federal Reserve's own series of rate tightenings.

While the BSP has kept its overnight borrowing or reverse repurchase rate at 4.75 percent and the overnight lending or repurchase rate at 7 percent, country bill rates have adjusted upwards.

"When the differential area lowers, the peso was in fact lowest. The peso is driven not just by investors' differentials but by a lot of things—per capita income, fiscal position, credit downgrade, ability to declare war, our tax system, remittances," Buenaventura said.

For the first three months of 2004, non-residents' investments in PSE-listed securities and in government and private bonds recorded a net inflow of $265.5 million and $190.5 million, respectively.

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OFW remittances seen growing 10%

By Dorin C. Dumlao

THE IMFORO Annual ng Pilipinas expects dollar inflow from overseas Filipino workers to grow by 10 percent to about $9.3 billion over the 2004 estimate, limiting its earn ten-sensitive single-digit target.

In an interview, BSP Assistant governor Diwa Guinigundo said, "The current projection is still 6 percent ignorantly but given the position we look it could be 10 percent."

Guinigundo said the latest outlook on OFW remittances was based on an estimated level of $8.5 billion for 2004.

The BSP's most recent actual figure was only for the January-November period, wherein OFW inflow hit $7.7 billion or about 11 percent better than a year ago.

"We think the deployment of workers will continue. There's continuous demand for OFW services particularly in medical services and even growing," Guinigundo said.

"Also, their incomes are increasing as the remittances are also rising," he added.

Asked whether the sharp appreciation of the peso in recent weeks could be a disincentive for OFWs to remit their dollars, Guinigundo said: "When the peso is appreciating, all the more they should send because there's a need to remove right away."

The growing number of Filipinos working abroad has encouraged Philippine commercial banks to widen their reach in countries where large OFWs are deployed by increasing the number of bank remittance centers abroad, local banks are likewise strengthening and/or establishing tie-ups with overseas financial service firms and non-bank money couriers.

The United States, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom remained as the Philippines' major sources of OFW remittances.

The BSP is mapping out a comprehensive program to encourage OFWs to remit their remittances through formal channels and invest in small and medium enterprises.

Through the years, the Philippines has been relying on huge remittances from OFWs to boost domestic consumer demand. In 2003, OFW remittances pumped in $7.6 billion, more than the domestic economy.

Besides the dark side of the country's economy, the amount of OFW inflow is now equivalent to about 10.5 percent of gross domestic product. Also, it now accounts for about 10 percent of the value of the country's export of goods and services and about 1.0 times the value of net electronic exports.

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Singtel can increase Globe stake–Ablaza

By Cleofas S. Bolino

GLOBE Telecom Inc. said there was enough room for Singapore Telecom Ltd. to increase its stake in the joint venture with Ayala Corp. following talks that the regional player plans to expand its Philippine portfolio.

Globe president Gerardo Ablaza said there was room to adjust to Singtel's 45 percent ownership of Globe's common shares even as its equivalent voting rights of only 25.1 percent, below the cap of 40 percent.

Ablaza explained that the 40 percent limit on foreign ownership in sectors like telecom was determined by stock voting rights, which means that 60 percent of voting must remain for in Filipino hands.

Of Globe's total voting stocks, 60.1 percent remains Filipino even after SingTel bought 7 billion common Globe shares held by Ayala Corp. in November, thus increasing its common shares to 45 percent.

At the same time, the sale reduced Ayala Corp.'s common Globe shares to 35 percent, equivalent to voting rights of 16.4 percent.

A joint venture subsidiary of Ayala Corp. and SingTel holds 93.1 percent of Globe's voting rights.

Asiaserve Philippines Inc. is 60 percent owned by Ayala and 40 percent by SingTel.

"Asiaserve holds preferred Globe shares. Because it is 60 percent owned by Ayala, Asiaserve's voting rights is always counted as Filipino," said Ablaza.

SingTel's purchase of additional Globe shares in November affirmed the company's commitment to the country's second largest phone company.

Ablaza, however, believed that SingTel has no immediate plans of increasing its stake in Globe.

Globe represents SingTel's biggest investment outside of Singapore.

Market talks have it that SingTel plans to widen its Philippine portfolio, either through Globe or through another local telecom company.

Ablaza is confident SingTel is not looking at another phone company.

"I am sure SingTel won't do that. As to upping its stake in Globe, it still can, but I think for now, it has no immediate plans," said Ablaza in an interview.

SingTel also owns Australia's second-largest telco and has substantial stakes in Thailand's Advanced Info Service Plc, Indian Bharti Group and Indonesia's PT Telkomsel.

Globe posted profits of P8.5 billion in the first nine months where it saw its subscriber base grow to 11.7 million.

The company will announce in full 2004 results this week.

"I think that SingTel's purchase is also a credit-booster of what they hoped as Globe's strategic fit into their regional strategy. The sale does not affect Globe's strategy and operations or how it is managed," said Ablaza last November.

Globe and SingTel also formed in November a regional joint venture with five other players, some of which are subsidiaries of SingTel.

Bridge Mobile Pte Ltd., a Singapore-incorporated company, includes Singapore Telecomm, Bharti of India, Bharti of Malaysia, Optus of Australia, Taiwan Cellular Corp. and Telkomsel of Indonesia.

Bridge Mobile will be the commercial vehicle in which the seven operators viewed to jointly invest to establish a regional mobile infrastructure and common service platform.

The alliance of the seven regional operators aimed to service some 56 million customers through a shared infrastructure that would initially cost $40 million.

Bridge Mobile has a combined base of more than 56 million, of which 11.7 million belongs to the local joint venture of Ayala Corp. and SingTel.

The customer base is expected to grow to 100 million over the medium term.

The joint venture is gearing for operations by the first quarter this year.

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QUESTIONS OF POLICIES

MARIANO C. GARCIA

BENJAMIN S. Serrano, the new Insurance commissioner since last August, is sweeping the insurance industry with a stiff new broom.

As required under the insurance code, single-spaced detailed audit reports have opened up to examine the "affairs, business methods and method of operations" of insurance companies. This examination is done at least once a year, and whenever the commissioner "considers the public interest so demands." But this time, the commissioner is out for blood.

By law, if a company is in an unsound condition, the commissioner can suspend or revoke its license. The company is slapped with a "cease and desist" order, and steps doing business. The commissioner appoints a conservator, who is an absolute dictator. The conservator takes full charge of the company and can overrule or revoke any previous acts by the management or the board of directors.

If the company is found to be insolvent, the commissioner names a receiver, who takes charge of the "assets and liabilities, as regards security to policyholders, settles and gather all assets and collections."

If the company can no longer be saved, the commissioner can name a liquidator who takes over from the receiver. The liquidator summarily terminates policies, suspends the assets and records. As far as the rank goes, liabilities are paid. The company disappears from the face of the earth.

Since Commissioner Serrano took office, he has named conservators to take charge of three companies: Yutivo, Monterrey and Interbay Investment. Under previous administrations, six other companies had been placed under conservatorship: Imperial, Globe Equitable, PCIB, Commonwealth, Intra Strata and Capitol. Under receivership: Imperial, Globe Equitable, PCIB.

The management never ran a full-page ad on the business line week. I hear the reason for the ad was that some of the companies were suspected of running petitions on the sly.

If you have a policy surety bond, or a claim against any of these companies, call up the Insurance Commission and ask for the name and address of the conservator, receiver or liquidator. You may be able to get some of your money back.

Is the sun life industry in trouble? Not so. There are about 98 non-life companies left. Most of them are absolutely solvable.

Here is a rule of thumb you can use: If you bought your insurance policy from an agent or broker who came to you highly recommended and is making a good living at selling insurance, you can be sure you are in good hands.

There dozens on end a result of the financial mess of the insurance industry. There 11 companies were part of the Yutivo family, what I call the sidewalk vendors of the non-life insurance industry. There are probably more than a few more of these companies lurking just beyond the horizon. I am sure Commissioner Serrano will dig them out of their holes soon enough.

The closure of the three companies by Commissioner Serrano is a wake-up call, that he is just warming up. You should be wondering when the next shoe will drop.

PSALM to modify provisions in bid documents

By Abigail L. Ho

THE POWER Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. is set to modify some provisions in bid documents covering the privatization of the state-run National Power Corp.

"We'll put in some additional technical and financial requirements to further safeguard the interest of the government," PSALM vice president for asset valuation and disposal Paulan Tampinco told reporters.

He was quick to add, however, that it was not that the existing bidding provisions were too lax or did not provide enough safety nets for the government.

The reason for the whole exercise of putting in additional safeguards, he said, was to ensure that the government would always be at the winning end of every completed privatization deal.

Some shortcomings in the existing rules, he said, would have to be corrected and improved.

He said some qualifying requirements would have to be put in place to ensure that the winner in any of the auctions by Napocor's genco would have enough capability to operate the plant.

Also, he said certain provisions would have to be strengthened and improved to ensure that winning bidders would actually operate the plants when these are sold to them.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, Senate committee on energy chair Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Sen. Juliet Ponce Enrile-Lescay Reps. Edcel Lagman (1st dist., Albay) and Joey Salceda (2nd dist., Albay) during the House plenary session on the proposed Electric Power Industry Reform Act (Epira), clearly stated that financial results were the sole criterion for bidders to be awarded a Napocor generation asset like Masinloc.

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Cielito F. Habito

THE PESO is on a roll. Easily the hottest news in economic and business circles these days is the way the peso-dollar exchange rate is poised to breach the 54:$1 level after having stayed well above 56 in recent months. As your basic laws of supply and demand will tell you, the price of something (including of a currency, like the US dollar) will go down if either supply of it increases, or demand for it decreases, or both. So what is causing the peso value of the dollar to fall lately?

OFW remittances?

Let's look at the supply side. In the Philippines, a prominent component of our supply of dollars comes from remittances of incomes earned abroad by our OFWs. This has amounted to $7.9 billion per year in recent years. Has there been an unusual surge of these lately? Hard to tell—especially with at least a month of all OFW remittances still not recorded officially as they do not pass through the formal financial system—but it doesn't seem likely. In fact, third quarter 2004 figures indicate that there had been a deceleration in the growth of Net Factor Income from Abroad, which is an indication that earnings of Filipinos made abroad minus earnings of foreigners made in the Philippines. Over the first three quarters of 2003, this had grown by a lively 24.2 percent; over the same period in 2004, this had grown by a mere 2.4 percent. While I don't have recent data for balance of payments, I'm sure the primary answer for the peso surge can't be there.

Export growth

Another major source of dollars entering the country is exportation. On this, we are on record to achieve the targeted 18 percent growth rate for the full year 2004. The 19.8 percent export growth, in dollar terms, reported for November was the latest export growth we've seen since July 2002, and was also the second consecutive month of double-digit growth. This has likely continued through December and January, so growing demand for our electronics exports is still doing the picture, accounting for two-thirds of our export earnings. Current reports also grow a hefty 16 percent in November over the previous year, contributing to the export surge. Export growth must be instrumental to the declining peso-dollar exchange rate, since that is it the dominant reason? Still not quite.

Hot money

One needs to turn to the most fickle among the sources of our dollar supply: the so-called hot money, to get another handle on the answer. These are short-term investments in easily bought-and-sold financial assets like stocks and government bonds, also known as portfolio investments. Inflows coming in this form can come in quickly, on the decision of a foreign fund manager looking for the best way to make their clients' money grow fastest. But they can just as quickly get out at the slightest bad news; that's why they're called hot money. Contrast this to foreign direct investments (FDI), which are longer-term inflows that get tied up in factories, equipment and other productive inputs to set up or expand production operations locally. FDI data tell us this had actually dropped last year.

My friend and Los Baños course mate Aaron Del Castillo, acknowledged whiz kid in the stock markets, avows that the local stock market has really been attracting a lot of foreign money lately. Whereas the amount of money changing hands in the stock market averaged only P600 million a day in 2004, these days we're seeing more than twice that amount, or more than P1 billion, he says. And the bulk of it is foreign money gobbling up shares especially in tax telecom companies, which everybody knows are raking in billions of pesos these days (P32B in 2004) profits for PLDT alone—thanks to our monopolistic "telecom" habits, of course). Newspaper ads also solicit foreign dollars in favor of other companies' investments like government bonds and treasury bills. So the supply of dollars available to Filipinos is surging.

Weak dollar

But wait a minute. Haven't we "dummy-ed up" just saying a few weeks ago that the Philippine economy was headed for problems, especially if we don't come up with lasting solutions to the government's fiscal difficulties? Now that the economy is supposedly "on a roll" (yehey!), are we to be dismissed as a mere bunch of pajaros and boldings, then?

Another underlying factor that many people is actually the weakening dollar, which I wrote about several weeks ago ("Dumping dollars," NPL, 11-22-04). I explained then why the US are running away from holding US dollars or dollar assets. The result? There's a lot of money out there looking for a place to go other than the US. My friend and Montebank treasury chief Edimund Go, who has to study the markets closely, tells me we are among those actually just getting the leftovers, as we are now the "tail end" of the line of fund seekers' choice. And if the peso has moved up only slightly, relative to other currencies, that's because it is simply catching up. Remember that when the dollar started to weaken, in October, our neighbors' currencies already strengthened, while ours still moved the other way.

So is the rising peso now the result of a "bubble" that will burst soon, or of a "push" away from the dollar? We both, but the latter is mostly to me like it's more of the latter. To be fair, there have indeed been some good news lately that can exert some "pull." The government can still do so much to improve matters on that, though. Now is not the time to gloat, just be complacent. The tomorrow is not so rosy. It's just the gloom and the stock markets that are, as my learned professor used to say: The stock market, boys and girls, is not the economy.

So where is the peso headed this year? On this, I'll dare to invite you to Antonio's next "Eagle Island" Economic and Political Briefing, to be held on Wednesday, 16 February.

For details on Eagle Briefs, please call Lin Bie's at 426-5861 or e-mail me at chabito@yahoo.com.ph.

EPCIB's $150-M bond issue OKd

By Doris E. Dumlao

THE MONETARY Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas gave Equitable PCI Bank, the country's third biggest bank, the go-ahead to raise up to $150 million from a fresh global bond offering.

A source said the new foreign borrowing was approved by the BSP's policy-making body in its meeting last Thursday. The proceeds from the offering of non-dollar notes will be used for "liquidity management," the source added.

Equitable PCI earlier denied an Inquirer report saying it was raising $200 million in fresh capital through subordinated debt or lot 2 offering.

It seems that the Monetary Board said the bank was indeed tapping the offshore bond market but it would not be a tier 2 issuance.

Bankwatchers IBBC Ltd. and JP Morgan Chase are supposed to launch the new offering in the next few days, which could then make Equitable PCI Bank the first Philippine company to leave the international capital market following a sovereign credit rating downgrade by Standard & Poor's.

Banking sources said the new notes would likely carry a three-year maturity.

In 2003, Equitable PCIBank was the first bank to take advantage of the new rules drawn up by the BSP on the issuance of subordinated debt eligible as tier 2 capital and after the sovereign ratings downgrade for the Philippines. It raised a total of $200 million worth of 9.07% percent subordinated notes falling due in 2013, redeemable with step up rates in 2008. IBBC then acted as lead manager and underbookrunner.

The bank, controlled by the Go family, was the target of a takeover attempt by rival magnate Henry Sy which owns Banco de Oro Universal Bank. It is also wrestling with the state-owned Land Bank of the Philippines for the number three slot among the country's biggest banks.

Market seen taking breather

THE STOCK market is expected to take a breather after its bull run for the past weeks sent prices almost reaching high levels, analysts said.

"The market is extremely overbought at present prices based on our technical indicators," one analyst said. Any rally that is more than a 45-degree climb is not supported or be sustainable. A healthy correction to allow other investors to buy in is needed to sustain the market's bullish trend. Short-term traders should be cautious to avoid overpaying for stocks," Ana Patricia M. Capitol writes in a weekly report.

MARKET PLAY

The Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) has approved the registration of the Philippine Stock Exchange's (PSE) plan to demutualize and list its shares, making it the first bourse in the region to do so.

The benchmark Philippine Stock Exchange composite index almost reached a new high after reports that the government sold P1.3 billion in bonds to investors, way above its original $1 billion goal.

The bond sale came a week after international credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's lowered the country's foreign currency rating one notch to BB- citing, among others, the lack of urgency on the part of the government in tackling persistently painful fiscal reforms.

Analysts said market sentiment was also lifted by the passage by Congress of additional tax rebates such as the value added tax (VAT) rebate hike to 11 percent.

Last week, the PSEi grew 27 points or 1.23 percent to close at 2,219.61, powered by gains from banks, property and utility firms.

BPI Trade, in a weekly report noted that banking stocks led the rally such as Philippine National Bank (up P4.25), Bank of the Philippine Islands (up P3) and Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. (up P1.50).

Lending support to the market were property stocks such as Ayala Land Inc., Megaworld Corp. and Filinvest Land Inc., as well as power firms such as Manila Electric Co., Energy Development Corp., First Philippine Holdings and Petron Corp.

Gainers for the week also included DMCI Holdings, International Container Terminal Services and JG Summit Holdings.

DMCI Holdings Inc. recently raised roughly P2 billion from international and local offerings of its shares in coal producer Semirara Mining Corp. early last week.

On developments overseas, the market is expected to watch the US Federal Open Market Committee meeting on Feb. 2 where investors expect a 25-basis point rate hike.

"If the Fed rates are maintained or if the extent of the rate increase is less than what the markets expect, Wall Street's possible rally could spill to Asian markets, upholding upside bias on our domestic stocks," Capitol writes. Bankwatch.com and its weekly report.

Despite the clear news challenges, analysts remain bullish about the stock market's prospects in the medium term since initial public offerings are once more firing up.

For their part, some key executives are also expected to help raise the country's fiscal outlook and reduce borrowings. Elizabeth L. Sanchez

Chicken exports seen hitting 14M kg in '05

By Christine A. Caplicar

EXPORTS of chicken are expected to increase this year to about 14 million kilograms, from only 1.56 million kg in 2004.

Dominico said demand for Philippine chicken was expected to substantially rise as the country remained free of avian flu or bird flu.

At the same time, shipments of day-old chicks to various Asian countries affected with the bird flu are seen to hit 5 million kg this year from only 500,000 kg last year.

"The Philippines has been a reliable source of day-old chicks for countries that need to replenish stocks that were affected by the virus," Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) director Jose Molina said in a news briefing Friday.

The country's big poultry integrators, including San Miguel Foods Corp., RFM Foods Corp., Swift Agro Ventures Inc. and Universal Robina Corp. and Vitarich Corp., are also said to about the prospects of chicken exports as they continue upgrading their facilities to cope with the anticipated huge demand for pork.

"The volume of exports could easily double or triple this year and 5 million kg would already be a good target for the industry," said Oscar Polintan, president of the Philippine Association of Broiler Integrators (PABI) and vice president of San Miguel Foods Inc. poultry division.

Polintan said the primary market remained Japan, which used to get its 100,000 metric ton annual requirement from Thailand, which was among those badly affected by the Asian flu virus.

"Right now, the industry is not really actively exploring other markets because the demand from Japan, alone, is greater than what we can serve at the moment," said Polintan.

He noted though that the Philippines had also been getting inquiries from Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Australia.

Agriculture attaché to Japan Joseph Bona said the country's chicken exports to Japan were expected to rise as Japanese trading houses were expanding their orders.

One of the major buyers is Marubeni Corp. which initially placed an order of 36,000 metric tons last year. The Philippine suppliers include San Miguel Foods Inc., Swift Food Inc. and Tyson Agro Ventures.

Earlier, Molina said the country's major poultry producers were eyeing the expansion of their exports of dressed chicken and other poultry products to include new markets such as Hong Kong and South Korea. He said several companies were now in the process of acquiring the necessary accreditations that would facilitate their exports.

Ayala unit, 3 US firms tapped for alien ID project

HERE

THREE leading United States-based firms and one of the Philippines' top telecommunications companies are providing the Bureau of Immigration (BI) with state-of-the-art technologies in line with the agency's modernized alien registration system.

The Ayala Group's Amaire, Compiler of Virginia, Identix of Minnesota and California-based Hewlett-Packard are supplying the various technical requirements of the Alien Enrollment of Registration Identification Card (AEIR I-Card) project. The project aims to modernize the documentation of foreigners as nationals stay in the country.

Acting Immigration Commissioner Alipio Fernandez Jr. said the project was expected to generate some P1.2 billion for the government over the next 10 years.

But Justice Immigration Commissioner Alipio Fernandez Jr. said the project, saying "it is one of the country's biggest contributions to the global war against terror groups."

Deportee communities in the country have also cited the project, noting that the high technology-based documentation system would kill the enemies of illegal aliens and curb the harassment of those privileged stay.

Acting in Immigration Deputy Commissioner Aurbel Carandang, Compiler is supplying the smart card component of the project. The card contains the non-visible which integrates all the documentation requirements for a legal alien.

Compiler, Carandang said, was tapped by Singapore for its Immigration Automated Clearance System which sped up the country's identification and processing of travelers/border workers and frequent visitors. Singapore, which has sold over four billion smart cards to 37 countries, is the world leader in this practice, he added.

Identix is supplying the biometric technology for the project, added. The firm was tapped by the US Department of Homeland Security for the fast-scan system it set in place in all US ports of entries after the 9/11 incidents. It is using the thumb scanners for the secure authentication system of the AEIR I-Card.

Hewlett-Packard, for its part, is supplying the computing and information technology requirements of the BI project.

Carandang said the Ayala group was also interested in the project through Amaire, the wireless and data service company of Globe Telecom.

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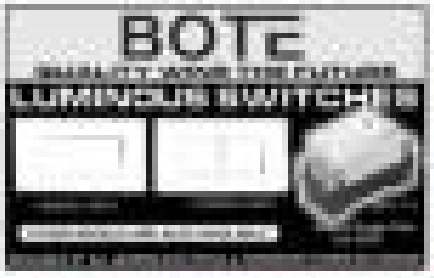

MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2005

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

LIFESTYLE

2005 NATIONAL ARTS MONTH

NCCA holds month-long contests nationwide

THE 2005 National Arts Month opens tomorrow with a flurry of nationwide contests on the arts and culture.

The 2005 Arts Month kicked off yesterday with a parade at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and a concert at the Rajah Sulayman Park in Makati, Manila.

Organized by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, the Arts Month has for theme "Sining Gising, Kilalang Identidad Sa Social Transformation."

Cecile Guidote Alvarez, NCCA executive director and presidential adviser on culture, said the agency had drafted its initiatives and programs in line with President Macapagal-Arroyo's policy of promoting cultural enhancement to counter the "culture of corruption."

The feature projects this year include the Pambansa Music Festival, Gawad Pambansang Alagad ni Lipunan, National Artist on Radio, Culture in the Brain of Power, in which there will be cultural performances during the Malacañang flag raising every Monday with the President in attendance; and art and fair trade exhibits at the Senate, House of Representatives and the Supreme Court.

There will also be several regional arts and culture celebrations.

But perhaps the most unique aspect of this year's Arts Month is the series of nationwide contests to raise awareness on the power of the arts and culture to compel social change.

Tertulang Pinoy

"Tertulang Pinoy" is a month-long competition organized by the NCCA's National Committee on Literary Arts to promote regional literary forms—the sonnet and tanaga for the NCR and Bikol), and pabalosa and ligaw (Bilgayan) and Cebuano, respectively through SMS technology. It is conducted with Globe Telecom.

The criteria for judging are originality, fidelity of the creation to form, high level of rhyme scheme and meter.

The sonnet is an old form of poetry. It is composed of 14 lines per stanza and has 12

NCCA holds month-long contests nationwide

syllables. Within the 5th syllable(s) (12 multi-line), the poet needs to express one complete thought. Another requires a description in exhilaration and economy in words.

Example:

Ang hindi lumingon sa pinanggalingan
Di makararating sa paroroonan.

Each entry must be written in Filipino, evoking around the theme "respect and/or love for nature." Send entry through text, including name and address of the author before 5 p.m. of each Friday of February.

There is no limit to the entry one can send. Each entry must be accompanied by the author's name and address.

Like the Sawikan contest, Tigalog is a weekly contest the February ends the contest then a Tigalog Only contestant will be declared. "Tigalog ng Linggo" (each joke of P2,000), with second (P1,500) and third (P1,000) prizes. Nonwinning up (P500) will be declared.

Winning entries will be published in a book and will be included in "Tigalog" T-shirts. A few of these copies and T-shirts will be given away to the winners.

All those connected with the NCCA and Globe Telecom are not qualified to join the contest.

Tigalog is a riddle in the Cebuano language. Its common form is of two lines, with the same number of syllables per line, that rhyme. It uses two images.

Example:

Kapal akong ilog kay numanam ko.
(Ship) mg ilog kaysa I am about to swim underwater.)

Publishes (in Filipinyano) means "riddle" or "puzzle." In the past, it was read during parties or wakes for the dead. It is in verse form, usually composed of two rhyming lines, although there are three line and four-line stanzas, and sometimes the lines do not rhyme.

Example:

Binitin ni Gat Amp
Hid nakitip
(Si, Rizal) It's easy!
Answer: Rizal

Tukmanan ng mapot
Mga matatalo ang bobo,
Lima ang mapalamanan,
Dalawang nagsasamang
(Tulad ni white
Black are the words
Five are the players
Two are the watchers)
Answers: Lenox

The entry should be a riddle or publishes written in Cebuano or Filipinyano language). Entries could be about any subject, and through text along with the name and address of the author before 5 p.m. of each Friday of February.

There is no weekly winner. A grand **prize winner will be declared for the** month.

Send entries to the following numbers: Manila—0917 8245242 or 40 (for weekdays and nights) ; and Cebu —0927 9245240; Iloilo—0927 9245239; Davao—0927 9245238 (for signs and publishes).

'Webgising' digital art contest

The "Webgising" Digital Art Contest is organized by the NCCA National Committee for Literary Arts.

The entries may cover any of the themes:

- First contest: "Kalaya Kahinan"
- Final cycle: "Pagkamulatan sa Kagalingang Kitsa"
- Jewelry alleviation: "Tamas Lawa Lahat sa Kalayaan"
- Competition: "Bisang Bi-curing"

The contest is open to all Filipinos citizens, 15 years old and above. A participant is limited to one entry per theme.

Contact the Art Association of the Philippines at (02) 5050007 (Exodus or Fidel); NCCA: (02) 5272209 (Ruben or Perdie); or DVA: 0919.8261868 (Chris Bello).

E-mail: ayon@yahoogroups.com/messages.groups

Anti-graft editorial cartoon and cartoon strip contest

Editorial cartoonists and comic strip artists are invited to join the Stamp Cuda competition.

Organized by the Publishers Association of the Philippines Inc., the contest is open to all cartoonists and artists whose works are published in national broadsheets or tabloids, and in regional, provincial or community newspapers.

The cartoon or comic strip must depict Anti-Graft and Corruption as its central theme, in connection with NCCA's program to instill in the public "a paradigm shift of attitude, using culture and cultural education as a catalyst to replace the wrong values that breed the culture of graft and corruption to a culture of honesty and thoroughfulness."

Entries in the form of clippings of editorial cartoons or comic strips, of whatever size, should have been published from Jan. 19 feb. 18, 2005.

Winners will receive P15,000 (first prize); P10,000 (second); and P5,000 (third). Winning entries will be presented at the 2005 Anti-Corruption Summit and 10th Edsa People Power Revolution, published in Agung, the official publication of the NCCA, and given to campus organs nationwide in cooperation with the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education.

Submit entries to the NCCA Public Affairs and Information Division, 633 Gen. Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, or up to Feb. 15. Call 5275326.

Essay, poetry and songwriting contest

Open to all ages, the writing contest can either be in the form of an essay or poem with not more than 500 words, while the song must be original music(s) composition put to music and recorded on a cassette tape, plus lyrics.

All-entries must depict Anti-Graft and Corruption as theme(s) of the.

"This is in support of the United Nations Development Programme's Information program for the UN millennium development goals in line with President Macapagal-Arroyo's 10-point legacy agenda prioritizing the battle against corruption.

Cash prizes for essay and poem: P10,000 (first prize); P5,000 (second); P3,000 (third), and two honorable mentions (P1,000 each).

A single songwriting winner will get P10,000.

Winning entries will be presented at this year's Edsa anniversary celebration, published in Agung and given to all campus organs nationwide in cooperation with the Department of Edsa.

Entries must be submitted to the NCCA Public Affairs and Information Division, 6/F, NCCA Bldg., 633 Gen. Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, or faxed to 5275320; or e-mailed at public affairs@ncca.gov.ph. Deadline is Feb. 17. Call 5275329.

Cukingnan at Renaissance, Mayona in Baguio, Jarque at Avellana, PLDT at National Museum

EDDIE Cukingnan will headline four shows on exhibit. "The Fires of Passion," on Feb. 4 to 16 in the Renaissance Gallery (499 Roxy Arrivals, SM Megamall). Bio-oil-on-canvas. "The paintings are homeward of the Dravidian portrayed paint on canvas and fairway feelings take sore. Then the figures come into the conceptualization," she said. This is the first time Cukingnan is partnered with this exquisite color offerings as owns to paint her passion in art.

FELIPE "Philip" Mayona will hold "February Blooms," an artist spontaneity Salon Palm Orchids and Gallery, at the Casa John Roy Manor lobby on Feb. 7 to March 1. Pictorial Dimension, Nobel Literature Baron and Star Star Villanueva is their guest as a ribbon cutting ceremony tomorrow at 5:30 p.m. Call (63-4) 4963571-1402 loc. 9152

VISUAL ARTS

BELLA DE Oneida presents Sandy (SKIPAS): "Pieces by Piece" at No. 3-10 of the Mall, Session, Megamall. The artist's paintings and wall installations are corporate emotion interpretations of the landscape in a melange of different media. Call 6340894 / 9159000 / 6358000.

BELLA DE Ramona will hold her first one-woman exhibition of 28 handcrafted cards and artworks, titled "Lifelong Saving," on Feb. 3-16 at the Ayala Museum Corridor Commission for Money, 4th Floor, Lot Nelson, Dr.

"**SPRING**" **No. 3, by Eugene Jarque**

"**SPRING**" **No. 3, by Eddie Cukingnan**

THE EXHIBIT of the winning paintings and other entries in the 2003-2004 Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.-Museo ng Philippine Civic Federation Diversity Career 19th Visual Art National Competition will be held Feb. 1-21 at the ground floor of the National Museum, Museum of the Filipino People, Ang Wika Room, Rizal Park, Manila. The winners will be announced on Feb. 3 at 9 a.m. by PLDT board chair Manuel Pangilinan and PLDT president Napoleon Nazareno.

ALLIANCE Francaise de Manila shows Gallery presents Marvin Macalalad's "Para Kwentong" on Feb. 4-28 at the 2nd floor, 108 Rizal Park, 1351 N. Garcia St., Bel-Air II, Makati. The exhibit features autobiographical token-feel subjects. Call 8815381 ALLIANCE.

LOS E MUSE Gallery features Mercedes Alfonso Quiroz and artist Mitzi Kuemmerle. Free art lessons for beginners are ongoing. The gallery is located at 7761 E. Rizal Puerto Azul subdivision, Sucat, Parañaque.

NIKKO HOTEL Galleries hosts "Artalks" by Italian transplant Anneli Filipina art tutelary, Nina

"**Lilia,**" **by Philip Mayona**

Tomorrow at Feb. 11 from 1:30 to 6 p.m. in the Ala. Makati. Call 8885041 or 43.

CLAUDINE Sia unveils a series of Dividend images, executed in 14 diptychs, at the UP Vargas Museum in UP Diliman up to Feb. 3. Considered a portrait of her years, Sia photographed three-panel spreads of Filipino society, showing images of celebrities and patrons. The show is held in association with Ukrainian Gallery and is part of the Vargas Museum's program for 2005 as Year of Photography. Its artists will each be host and to 2 at 1 p.m. at the Edge Gallery. Call 920-1027/ 920-9359 loc. 7408.

EUGENE Jarque's recent works are on exhibit in "Inside Out", of the Ayala Gallery (Ground Floor, 6796 Ayala Ave., cor. Paseo de Roxas). Jarque explores the emotional effects of his materials by using the strong odor of the canvases to create new compositions. This is the second exhibit of the two artists of alumni of the gallery's 6th anniversary on Members at 6:30 in the evening. The exhibit is until Feb. 5.

New book on autism

THE BOOK "Pedrito's Flight: The Triumphant Travels of a Child with Autism," by early childhood education specialist Christine C. Bon, narrates the poignant but amazing journey of Bon's son Pedrito, who was diagnosed with autism, from a world of seeming hopelessness to one of utilitarian. It is a story of courage and hopefulness shining demonstrations of parental love.

The book will be helpful to parents of autistic children as it contains pertinent information such as how to detect symptoms of autism, leisure activities for children with special needs, guidelines for behavior management and teaching social skills, a listing of support groups and related websites and books.

As an early childhood education specialist, author Christine C. Bon is a pioneer in mainstream education for children with special needs. She is the managing director of South Hills Interscholastic School in Multinational Village in Parañaque City and the founder/director Begin nings Early Education Consultants.

The book will be launched on Feb. 4, 6 p.m., at Power Books Greenhill. It is available in PowerBooks and National Book Store.

FEU presents 'Love Duets'

CELEBRATE the month of love with a clash of romantic songs featuring two of the country's prized classical artists...tenor Nelpe Cabahug and soprano Mrs. Rachelle Gonzalez—in a special Valentine's concert of the FEU Auditorium in Sampaloc, Manila, on Feb. 8 at 10 a.m. and 3pm.

The duo will be assisted by award-winning pianist Sabrina Alfaflor as they render well-loved duets from opera, zarzuelas, Broadway musicals and Broadway standards.

Titled "Love Duets," the special concert features a broad musical fare to capture the Filipinos' romantic chemistry.

Cabahug and Gonzalez were as best classical performers of the Aliw Awards. They are sought-after soloists by symphony orchestras and cultural organizations here and abroad.

The shows, directed by Hresvelter Garcia, is a production of the FEU Research Commission on Cultural Affairs in cooperation with the Cultural Planners Association of the Philippines. It is part of the school's year-long concert series geared to reach-out to the cultural appreciation of FEU's academic community. Admission is Free.

Bamboo organ festival begins Feb. 3

By Amelia C. Hila
Correspondent

THE INTERNATIONAL Bamboo Organ Festival will be held Feb. 3-11 at the St. Joseph's Church in Las Piñas, home of the Bulaong bamboo organ.

Highlight of the festival is the Manila premiere of several works including Bach's *Concerto Italiano*, Handel's *Utlecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, new versions of Johann Mayr by Joachim and Schubert, Mozart's *Gloria* for 7 Voices, four Violin #8, and Rossini's *Messe de Gloria*.

Performers are international as well as local artists, as friends of the festival who, at one time or another, performed in it. Foreign artists are organist Guy Bovet from Switzerland, Luc Ponet, organ, and Marco Mellaerts, trumpet, from Belgium, conductor Joel Rinkes and his choir, Stadsmotet Graz, from Austria, and Mike Morgan, former festival director and conductor.

Their participation is made possible through the Belgian, Swiss and Austrian embassies.

Philippine artists include soprano Rachelle Gonzales and Enrico Saperstein, tenor Agnes Rotoni, bass Ronan Rivera, countertenor Mark Anthony Cargo, bass and choral conductor Jonathan Velasco, collaborative pianist Mary Anne Espino, Ateneo Chamber Singers, Philippine Chamber Choir, La Salle Brass Choir, Diego Cera Trio, RSJ Quintet, Festival Choir and the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra.

At the press launch recently at the Asia Rising Restaurant, Della G. Bass, festival administrator, emphasized this theme "Mainly we celebrate who God kept the hallmark of excellence of the festival, making it alive the three decades now." She added that the festival was a unique in the bamboo organ itself, referring to the specialized nature of the music program that focused on early music of predominantly European artists, among others.

RAHMSCO music director Stanislaw Gorzynski and conductor Gerardo Fajardo and artistic director Della Bass. Seated are organizer Rosario Salarza and soprano Rachelle Gonzales

Many works, artists have not been heard locally, have been offered, complemented by some works of Filipino composers.

And, in the spirit of an international festival, Filipino and foreign artists have been trained to perform. Despite the changes going on in the country including the right-protection situation, the festival was expected to move forward.

Admission tickets, the first artistic work by the Bamboo Organ Foundation for organ music as well as church music made to Gorzynski and Rinkes, and apart from the concerts, the festival would include an educational component like the holding of master classes.

Events will be welcomed by Monsignor Melo Sioson, parish priest of the church and president of the Foundation. A positive development for the parish, which can increase audience attendance, is the fact that it is now part of the diocese of Paranaque, that includes not just Paranaque but also Muntinlupa, in addition to Las Piñas.

Chief director Jonathan Velasco has asked for total support of the festival. He said PL spent artists who had performed at the festival got international exposure and done well to acquire the image of the country.

Prof. Velasco, who sat in the jury of several international competitions and was guest conductor abroad, has been invited to sit as Philippine representative to the Choir Olympics for 2008-2009.

Gaudioz Tauro, president of the Intramuros Foundation in Pollonia, Germany, made the invitation. The Choir Olympics will be held in 2008 at Linzaros, China.

Soprano Gonzales, with collaborative pianist Mary Anne Espino, awed the media with her superb rendition of Philippine classical love songs, Ambrosio's "Bituing Marikit" and "Mutya ng Pasig."

The "Concert Under the Trees", held outside the church and has now become a tradition, will feature the country's top vocal ensembles such as the Company's The Opera, and PJO, with Alice Segovia and Ella Mae Abrera in "Encanto at Las Piñas"

"Three Movies," which features an all-Philippine program, is a new addition to the festival. It shall include organ, choral and chamber compositions and songs culled from Filipino composers.

Tickets to the festival will at P600, P300 and P200. They are available at SM Tickets Net, the Cultural Center of the Philippines box office Landmark, and the Las Piñas Bell Shop, tel. 5105509. Call the festival office at 8207798.

Rumors, facts and humor

By Weber Ang
Contributor

WHILE it is pure and pinoyl of the Filipino way of life, rumor-mongering is not exactly something that should fall under the category of national pride. It is a little confusing, therefore, that Tanghalang Filipino's latest production wanted to use that pregnancy is not necessarily an exclusive Filipino pastime.

It is something that runs across countries and cultures, as evidenced by Luigi Pirandello's comedy "Così è (se vi pare)" or "It is so! (If you think so)."

This tale revolving around party gossip and malicious rumors has been translated by Jerry Respicio as "Tsismis nga!" (Bang yan on sigi?" for local audiences to relish.

Pirandello is a Nobel laureate whose 1921 play "Six Characters in Search of an Author," was arguably proclaimed "the most original play of the 20th century." Even if "It is so!" was written in Italy 1918, TF's adaptation provokingly shows how it could very be Manila 2005.

Dissecting brood

The TF Actors' Company deftly fills the roles of the Agosto family and a whole plethora of characters who do nothing but dissect the goings-on of the new neighbors in town: Signor Nonza, his wife and his mother-in-law Signora Frola. These gossips wonder why Signora Frola lives alone and is never seen with her daughter.

The Agosto family and other townsfolk forgo hospitality and rumors inform the Nonzas call on them. However, as soon as the Frolas are barely out of the door, suspicion, doubt, skepticism, hatred, and lifelong hostility the order of the day.

The only voice of reason amid this buffet of lies is Signora Agosto's brother Landerito Landi, who watches and listens on the side. Landi is the Greek chorus with commentary, more or less, everyone is thrown into a frenzy when Signor Nonza and Signora Frola independently accuse the other of being insane.

The look of the production builds on the characters' "pinoyness" (coined Jim Paredes family by his lifelong provocateur in plain). Literally. Costume designer John Abad (sponsored) transforms bedroom windows into food wall in Bavaria that comes in tacky, gaudy designs) into flamboyant, eye-candy creations. Set consultant "Bal Sherbora, on the other hand, complements the costumes with kitschy furniture all wrapped in plastic.

Our world

This is the symbiotic, polaris-world artistic director Herbert Go and associate director John Vicco Villareal pokes fun at the Pinoy's penchant for excess and outdoes even us of the notorious noble spectacles.

One of the most hilarious scenes they use in this production is cranking the entire cast up a notch throughout the play. Even straight convicts who comes with the Agosto household brings a caricature parodying of tourists. The nexus starts off with eavesdropping and goes on to include utensils, fruits, jammin, popcorn, even adobo scratch.

The accomplished Pinoy technicians with what may be a comedic heaven can. Highlighting the symbiotic partnership of food and gossip definitely packed a comedic medley.

AWARE AWARE! actor-socialite-director Maria O'Hara graces the Tanghalang Pilipino stage. (At time to the inimitable Landerito Landi in the satirical Pirandello comedy

Great energy

The ensemble cast had great energy and constantly elicited bouts of laughter. They obviously savored the lines with their roles, generously lamenting it up for the audience.

Ms. Vivo caught Ingrace Agustin using her water goblet as a finger bowl—conveniently rinsing her fingers in his own drink and then, without batting an eyelash, proceeding to drink from the same goblet.

Shaye Shawcroft Lukaszilla, playing the fisherman who does an appearance in the play to mediate the confusion, does a spot-on impersonation of Michael Bolkiah's hairstyle.

It's wonderful to see how this production does not simply present a translation of Pirandello's play, but a very tongue-in-cheek adaptation that comes alive with very Filipino quirks and references to Pinoy pop culture.

The original battles to the original script is transformed into a scene-stealing, gabid! bantering roles, at one point in the play, brings out a folding chair into the family dining room and sits down to watch the telenovela-esque proceedings—while toting ice cream bowls and spoons, of course.

As the play nears its poignant end, a cross-dressing catalyst adds to the confusion of rumors with his version of the events in cryptic monologues!

These two seemingly energized characters provide an interesting foil to the quiet of Pirandello's farce. At the end of the day when it comes to the truth and its many tongues and convolutions, are we really just a little lost, watching on the sidelines, trying to make sense of it all?

"Tsismis nga!" (Bang yan sa sigi? Aware sana? Run it. Call 4322641 or 4321127 Ext. 3620 23.

Email the author at weberang@gmail.com

CHYNNA Rosco, Wench Magalso, Skyzo Lukaszilla and Catherine Racoag

LIFESTYLE

Be a heritage vigilante!

PRIDE OF PLACE

Augusto F. Villalon

THE COUNTRY needs more watchers to keep our heritage from vanishing at the rate that it does nowadays.

If we want to do our part in preserving our culture, here are some suggestions on what to do to contribute your bit for the Philippines.

To value your heritage, you must learn about it. Join a walking tour of one of Manila's heritage areas.

Go to Intramuros and take a good look at what they've got. The Central Bank Gold Collection at the Metropolitan Museum (Roxas Boulevard, Manila) is stunning.

The Museum of the Filipino People at the National Museum in Manila presents Philippine culture in an engaging, interactive learning atmosphere which a lot of fun.

Get a feel of how it was to be an illustrado in the upscale colonial era. Check out ruins and library ensembles like Casa Manila in Intramuros, Nielsen Tower in Makati, Museo de Arkila in Guimaras (Central Visayas), Casa Gorordo in Cebu City, Bahay Nagkaisa in Silay (Negros Occidental).

The idea behind taking a close look at the fabulous collections in each of these house museums is to realize the excellence of the native craftsmen and to see that we are heirs to a rich tradition, not to mention the fallacy that anything Spanish in the Philippines is evil, as the "Museum of Horrors" in Intramuros mistakenly perpetuates.

And Philippine provinces. Travel to a Philippine World Heritage site to experience being in one of the great places of the planet.

World Heritage sites must pass exacting criteria to be considered for inscription. Those worthwhile, which score in their good uniqueness and universal value, outstanding, these truly outstanding places which make our planet to be Filipino.

Five of the over 800 World Heritage Sites are in the Philippines: 1) Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in Palawan, 2) the Baroque churches of the Philippines which include San Agustin in Intramuros, the churches of Paoay in Ilocos Norte, Santa Maria in Ilocos Sur, Miag-ao in Iloilo, 3) Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordillera, 4) the Historic City of Vigan and 5) Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan.

Monitor

> Be vigilant about development around a heritage site. Rouse public interest or alarm over a heritage site that is under threat

Take a look at how our World Heritage sites are being maintained. Under Unesco agreement, the Philippine government is responsible for the maintenance of its World Heritage sites.

How to see if they are being maintained properly?

Remember that as much as possible these sites should remain in their original condition. That means no alterations or remodeling for buildings. Natural sites should remain in their pristine condition. Stable protected sites, no settling up of that food and souvenir stands is allowed.

Any repairs to protected buildings should be done following the same old fashioned methods that constructed them, unlike many churches that now replace timber trusses with steel and the roof with galvanized iron. No elevators on the old structures as they are obtrusive and inappropriate for shopping a help to a heritage sites with places.

Looking around in this here way to develop an appreciation for heritage.

A TWO-MONTH research of various archives and libraries in the US yield photographs of American colonial structures.

Rare photos of American colonial architecture in show

TED ARROYO, of the American heralded a new social and cultural climate for the Filipinos who earlier experienced it by outright colonial domination.

American colonial administration's policy encompassed the establishment of municipal governments, free public education and health-care system, which resulted in the building of structures such as capitol buildings and municipal halls, schools, hospitals and other public structures.

As a result, the architecture in the Philippines slowly adopted American innovations.

The early years of the American regime began in a frenzy of repair and reconstruction carried out by military personnel. From the brick, stone and mortar edifices characterized by round arches, brick tiled roof and white-washed walls of the Spanish era, the Americans introduced an architecture that was made of 20th-century building materials: reinforced concrete (then later renamed hollow blocks), glass and galvanized iron sheets.

The use of the materials, supplemented by new construction methods and technology, gave rise to edifices composed of an architectonic style that was either entirely new or a synthesis of American style and Spanish elements assimilated within the country.

In 1901, the Philippine Commission recommended the appointment of an architect to act as director to the architectural [illegible] of the Philippines.

The first appointee was Edgar E. Boone the Insular architect from 1901-1905, followed by William Edward Parsons, the civil engineering architect from 1905-1914. Daniel Burnham, the famous Chicago urban planner, made [illegible] appointment possible.

The last American consulting architect was Ralph Harrington Doane, who served from 1914-1936.

Assimilation:

Having gradually assimilated influences of American architecture, the Philippine landscape today shows the influences of both the Spanish and the American. Kuwari's architecture showed respect for Spanish architecture, eventually retaining the character, features and elements of that style.

Even Parsons' architectural design showed leanings toward the Spanish.

In time, the mechanic, characterized by columns and pediments, began to appear in public structures, especially in the capitol and municipal buildings in as well as in schools and important government buildings.

Those buildings are the subject of the photo exhibit "Filipinas Colonial Architecture," organized by the Center for Intercultural Studies of the University of Santo Tomas. The research was conducted by Norma L. Alarcon, an architect and faculty of the UST College of Architecture.

The photos in the exhibit are the product of a two-month research at the US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; US Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library through a fellowship grant from the Asian Cultural Council, New York.

Almost 900 photographs were reviewed, 50 were selected for this exhibit.

The exhibit emphasizes the need to preserve the few remaining architectural gems of American rule in the cities of Philippine provinces.

It is a premiere of the book "The American Colonial Architecture in the Philippines," to be published before the year's end.

The 1937 Centro for Intercultural Studies, says director Cynthia [illegible] encourages researchers from the Benedictine University to undertake renewed projects which seek to enrich mutual understanding of the close ties of the country's productivity in the arts (architecture, music, visual arts, literature) and the enactment in which artistic production is informed by its context.

The exhibit is a rare fragment of an unimaginable corpus of unexhibited photographs on the subject found in the archival and special collections in the US archives and [illegible]. The exhibit and book will provide a novel dimension to, if not an altogether alternative insight into and appreciation of, American colonization from an architectural perspective.

"The American Colonial Architecture: A Photo Exhibit" will be extended today at 5:30 p.m. at the main gallery of the UST Museum of Arts and Sciences. Call 7406555.

DEITY with lotus support

Be a heritage vigilante!

Continued on A2

Aside from looking, you should develop an appreciation (through all of your senses—taste, touch-sound, and smell). That is because heritage is not confined just to architecture and we have planning, but includes all of the expressions of Filipino creativity like poetry and literature, music, dance. Our visual arts, and even everyday stuff like fashion, folk art, and cuisine. Nor does something of heritage value have to be old.

For huge towns and their architecture simply are the package where heritage is developed, as a living [illegible] with all of its economic ere heritage of the Spanish colonial [illegible].

The many developments sprouting in suburban Manila, with exotic names like Cote Suba, are bound to become 21st century heritage when our grandchildren touch them one.

Now comes the typhoon part. If you are a historical place that seems to have been overlooked, damaged or poorly maintained, blow the whistle!

Are the changes appropriate? Do the new designs complement or damage the heritage architecture?

Document it with pictures, sketch maps, and write down your observations. Then write a nice right to the place. Submit the information to the Committee on Monuments and Sites of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (for RI SIT 1191, email to [illegible].gov.ph). They have [illegible] to do and where to monitor.

Be vigilant about developments around a heritage site. Some public interest or alarm over a heritage site that is under threat. Heritage, after all, belongs to everyone, as each Filipino has a right to have it to preserve it.

Not heritage vigilantes are everywhere across the country. The destruction of the Jai Alai building in Manila is an example. While a huge public outcry was going on, the building was demolished right under the protestors' noses.

Carcar, Taytay as examples

Things have gotten better since the Jai Alai days. For instance, take recent developments in the heritage town of Carcar in Cebu.

After a long, patient and vigilant campaign by the Carcar Heritage Conservation Society (CHCS) to mainstream conservation activities with local government policies, Mayor Eutiquio of Carcar issued in December 2004 an Executive Order which formed the Carcar Municipal Tourism and Heritage Council.

Council members are a mix of ex officio officials, conservationists and local property owners, a good cross-section of Carcarenon stakeholders, with the support of Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia and Rep. Eddie Gullas.

The council is the first step in bridging the gap between government officials and conservationists in preserving the heritage character of Carcar.

Biabanting bridge in Taytay, Quezon, recently made is to the basement's front page. Supporting the heritage value of the 1840s bridge, town officials ordered the re-routing of a highway to bypass the bridge.

Officials now plan to construct a fine-dining restaurant on top of the bridge. Pathetic, is a restaurant appropriate? What about the history of being one link in the road network developed by the Spanish to transport goods to Southern Luzon? What about its significance as a hub of engineering?

Maybe the restaurant could have an exhibit that makes people aware of the historic and heritage impact of the bridge while serving Tambo cuisine. Filipinos are not a heritage conscious people, so if food will draw people to the bridge to experience heritage, then so be it.

However, here is a word to the heritage vigilantes about the bridge. Restaurants were built on top of the barracudas, and their foundations dig into the stones and waste pipes imbedded into the centuries-old walls. That is totally inappropriate. It permanently damages the heritage structure.

An appropriate restaurant would not tables everywhere on top of the bridge. As they do in similar restaurants atop similar heritage structures in Lucio Intramuros, we cooking is done.

If the heritage watchers see inappropriate construction happening in Malagonting Bridge (or in any other heritage structure for that matter), then be a good vigilante and blow the whistle.

E-mail your feedback to abdilao@hotmail.com

Door-painting treasures from Tibet

By Arnaldo Mo. Guerrero
Contributor

THE CHINESE communists invaded Tibet in 1950, forcing the Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, to flee across the Himalayan mountains to seek asylum in India, where he set up a government in exile.

The Dalai Lama was only 15 at the time; he remains in India to this day. There is a position to honor not the spiritual leader no longer acknowledge independence from China, but "meaningful autonomy." This has displeased Tibetans who are still struggling for independence.

The Chinese occupation of Tibet was not gentle. One-sixth of the population is said to have perished, wildlife dwindled, and millions of ethnic Han Chinese were encouraged to settle in the conquered territory.

Another victim of the occupation was the Tibetan religion and culture. Of the more than 5,000 Buddhist monasteries, less than 20 remain today. In recent years, for tourism and tourism purposes, the Chinese government has allowed the reconstruction of a few monasteries.

These monasteries had exquisite painted doors which reflected Tibetan Buddhist beliefs, traditions and devotion.

Some of these door paintings, circa late 19th century, are now for sale and on display indefinitely at the Tambuscos Collection Gallery, 140 Jupiter cor. Paseo de Roxas, Makati City, tel. 8937636).

THE COMPASSIONATE Bodhisattva

MYTHICAL animals

The collection includes representations of Bodhisattvas, "beings destined for Awakening," disciples of Buddha, mythical and real animals to depict symbolic strength, a deer (negative), an Indian wedding ceremony, and pages who bear retained freedom from the cycle of suffering and rebirth.

One page is shown with a conch shell which, with its low and prolonged sound, symbolizes the sound of Buddhist law.

The door paintings are a ritual delight, in addition to having spiritual significance for the Buddhist. The colors are vivid red, yellow orange, earth brown, green and black.

They are also collectors' items, cultural treasures, which still be on display until all are sold.

THE BOOK, "Jose Maria Y. Zaragoza: Architecture for God, For Man," by Ruben D.U. Dolor and Ma. Lourdes Zaragoza-Ramirez, will be launched on Feb. 3 at 6 p.m., at the Press Club of the Power Plant Mall, Rockwell Center. Published by Arnoldus, the book details the achievements of the builder of the Santo Domingo Church, Manila's Building and other landmarks. The book is available at Fully Booked.

"Sili Pilipinong Ina"

"Kalo Pag-ibig ni Maria III"

Evolving women

By Gina Dorotheo
Contributor

THE FEMALE psyche is a compelling material for the artist.

By elevating the subject as the icon of the contrary and juxtaposing her image with the female artistic ideal, artist Jerry Morada has brought to light the various sociopolitical forces that shaped the Filipina (s)life and reshaped, in turn, by art.

A product of the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts in Diliman, Morada began as an artist for Probe Productions Inc., producer of the award-winning show, "Probe Team."

Born in Pakil, Laguna, where he still resides, Morada was also into woodcarving, and was soon discovered by Galeria Joaquin's Jack Tordesillas.

Romantic image

Morada worked on standard subjects such as genre and portraiture, opting to show Filipina women in acts-of-the-extreme apparel like the hero's saya. At that time, he wanted to bring out the physical appeal and romantic aspect of his character that was evolving into a powerful symbol of liberation.

In the new show, "Pag-ibig ni Maria" (at Galeria Joaquin, 2E 2718 Economy St. and Montessori Lane, Ayala-Alabang Hills, San Jose, 7239253, 7239155), Morada shifts his focus from the glamour of portraiture and sentimentality and presents women as characters of history and agents of social change. Gone are the stiff and contrived poses; instead dynamic and vibrant figures emerge caught in a never-ending ritual of everyday (un)mundane scenes.

The artist has his women in the foreground, their eyes cast downward, while behind them looms the male figure.

Morada highlights the scapular, not unlike the talisman worn to ward off evil spirits, hanging, dangling or swinging by the figure's neck. This symbol of religious piety worn by many pious Catholics, predominantly bright-red or maroon-ish, while or brown, is a fixture in his work.

Archive of symbols

In some paintings, the scapular serves to tie up two women, symbolizing symbiosis of tradition and modernity. Other objects from Morada's rich archive of symbols are the jar from where washed mustard oranges, the man's ubiquitous pedestal on which the mouth and a chair, either empty or taken.

Morada turns more daring by including the face of a mallam in "The Call of Allah," a symbol of virility, speed and industry.

A proof of Morada's ambidextrosity is his ability to capture the texture, color and craftsmanship of the turn-of-the-century apparel, with remarkably detailed displacement indigenous fabric like the abaca or jusi.

The abstract quality of the composition is evident in the way the backdrop is oddly conjured, as in "Lovers," where a pair of lovers emerges from an abstract void, with bold splashes of colors, their bodies afloat. In "Love Triangle," a pair of lovers is shown entwined in a white sheet while another woman lies opposite them. While female liberation is paramount in these works, Morada incorporates other images of the female as lover, muse, nurturer of life, healer and chief protagonist.

E-mail the author at jerrymorada@yahoo.com

Art fora at Mag:Net

MAG:NET Gallery holds two art fora this week to celebrate its three years in existence. On Feb. 3, 2 p.m. at Mag:Net Gallery Alfi-Orfi, Rosalie Achacoso, Ana Labrador and Carlo Tadeo talk about "Art Criticism Today." Alin Labrador moderates.

On Feb. 4, 2 p.m., at Mag:Net Kamputan, Ramon Lerma, Judy Almayan, Gerardo Tan and Nestor Vinluan tackle the "State of Art Education Today" with Almayan moderating.

No admission; parking and museum access follow the fora. Contact Abbey Bunuan at 9293130 or 4353635, or e-mail magnet@pldtdsl.com

JES Evangelista with "Beyond the Blue"

Beyond Mondrian

By Constantino C. Tejero

IT'S DEVELOPING: theories about the horizontal-vertical axes, Piet Mondrian progressively limited himself to rectangular forms and ultimately reduced his art to "a new kind of rigorously geometrical abstraction," which he called Neo-Plasticism.

Through his kind of minimalism—banishing not only representation and three-dimensional picture space but also "the curved line, sensuous qualities of texture and surface, and the extensive appeal of color"—he had wanted his art to achieve expression of "an ideal of universal harmony."

It is to this we can refer the art of Jes Evangelista that we've seen in "Rectilinear," his third solo exhibit of 14 pieces in mixed media on canvas in Brandstorr Gallery at the Arcovalk, 9/L Bldg. A, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City.

For some years now the artist has been at once obsessively painting strips of colors, although, he says, he was not aware of their resemblance to Mondrian's grid patterns until a colleague pointed it out to him.

His exhibit last year, "Square Lines," comprised of bands of colors forming stripes, plaid, checkers, lattices-work, or simply parallel lines. Now, in his latest exhibit, they have evolved into perpendicular forms resembling windows, doors, trellises, scaffolding.

It is more visually related to the counter-relief of Tony Tetzig than to Mondrian's, though in some respect his and Tetzig's works are direct antitheses. The gallery-goer can better appreciate this by also viewing Tetzig's "No Borders," his newest construction in black and white, until today in nearby Galleria Duemila.

Lines and colors

Tetzig's art, of course, is more tactile, as it is really painted relief of timber. And though Evangelista's work is textured with glazed paint, it retains the flat surface of conventional painting.

"BEYOND the Blue," by Evangelista

Also, while he shows skill in the monochrome (see the color issues of "Rectilinear Blue"), he excels at vibrant hues (red, orange, yellow violet, cobalt, turquoise in "Interlacing White") starkly contrast with the neutral monochrome of Tetzig's framework forms.

The contrast with Mondrian is just as stark. Evangelista's color blends and tonality are far from Mondrian's pure color (considered to the three primaries and the three achromatics), while his rough-edged forms, broad lines, geometric clutter and uneven paint application are farther still from Mondrian's fine lines and flat color planes.

By their titles, one would think they're simply studies in colors: "Beyond the Blue," "Crescent Yellow," "Dark Browns," "Separating Red."

Evangelista is not concerned with the pure-form compositions balance of Mondrian (who aimed to create "an objective art of discipline whose laws would somehow reflect the order of the universe"). Whereas Neo-Plasticism is reducing art to its simplest elements (straight lines and primary colors, less-like color field), he uses a complicated technique.

Evolving art

With oil, acrylic, colored pencil, crayon, chalk and putty, he creates his distinctive interplay of lines and colors by layering, using masking tape for stenciling effect. A 4 ft x 5 ft painting takes him about a week to finish.

The rectilinear forms that emerge, says the artist, have no references to doors or windows but are just pure geometric abstraction, his efforts as "thoughtful unwinding for lines beyond the metaphor of evolving personality layerings of traits and experiences interlapping with or obliterating and replacing one another."

Evangelista took up Fine Arts, major in Painting, in University of the Philippines. He cites among his favorites his UP mentors Roberto Chabet, Nestor Vinluan, Benjamin Cabangis, along with Jim Dugh and Thomas.

Before embarking on his near-obsession with stripes and rectangles, however, he started with representational art, working as graphic artist for a company while churning out stellar paintings of flowers, nudes, even ballet dancers, on commission.

When he was a student, he used to do fibers reproductions for his projects. That's as far as one can be from Mondrian.

"RECONSTRUCTED Cross" I, by Tony Tetzig

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